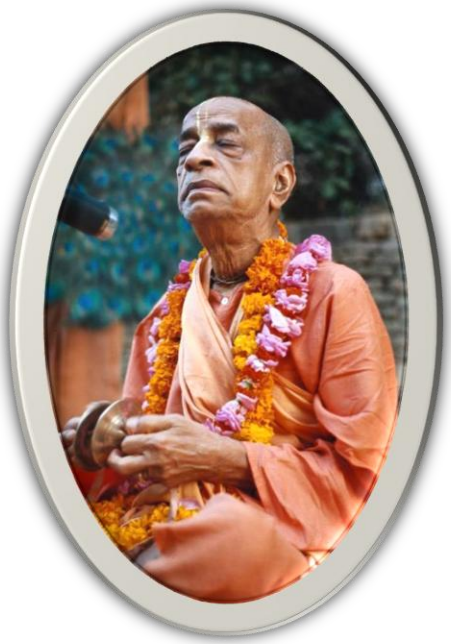
Śrī Bhaktalīlāmṛta

Śrī Mahīpati Bova

(Celebrated Marathi Poet and Author on the Lives of Saints in Mahārāṣṭra)

Dedication



His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

Founder-Ācārya of the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness (ISKCON)

The Divine Emissary who carried the holy name and message of Śrī Paṇḍuraṅga Viṭṭhala (Kṛṣṇa) to every corner of the world and uplifted them from material entanglement.

Introduction

Śrī Mahipati Bova Tāharābādkar – The Poet-Saint of Bhakta-Charitra

Invocations

Śrī Gaṇeśāya Namaḥ
Śrī Sarasvatyai Namaḥ
Śrī Gurave Namaḥ

By composing over forty thousand devotional verses (ovīs) saturated with divine love and reverence, Kavivarya Mahipati Bova Tāharābādkar earned a revered place as one of Maharashtra's foremost biographical poets of saintly lives. His celebrated compositions—Śrī Bhaktavijaya, Śrī Santlīlāmṛta, and Śrī Bhaktalīlāmṛta—shine like priceless jewels in Marathi devotional literature. Through the sacred river of his poetry, he has purified and uplifted countless hearts, leading them to the feet of the Lord.

A Divine Birth Bestowed by the Lord of Pāṇḍharpur

Śrī Mahipati Bova was born in the year 1715 CE (Śaka 1637) in Tāharābād, a village then under Mughal rule. His full name was Mahipati Dādopant Kāmbale, a Ṛgvedic Brahmin of the Vasiṣṭha gotra. His father, Śrī Dādopant, was a deeply pious soul who spent his days immersed in *snāna-sandhyā*, *devatārcana*, and *dhyāna*. For him, Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga of Pāṇḍharpur was everything. He undertook the monthly pilgrimage to Pāṇḍharpur on each Śuddha Ekādaśī for 24 uninterrupted years.

As he grew older and reached the age of sixty, his body grew frail, making the journey difficult. Yet one day, mustering his strength, he made his way to Pāṇḍharpur again. With tears in his eyes, he gazed upon the beautiful form of dark-hued Pāṇḍuraṅga and, overwhelmed with emotion, cried:

"O Lord of all gods, perhaps this is my last darśana of You. My body cannot carry me any longer. My only wish is that this tradition of pilgrimage may continue in my lineage—but alas, I have no son..."

That night, something miraculous occurred. As he lay in a corridor outside the temple, Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga appeared to him in a dream, smiling graciously and placing a divine sweet (peḍhā) on his palm. The Lord said:

“Dear one, do not grieve. Give this sweet to your wife, and your heartfelt desire will be fulfilled.”

When Dādopant awoke, the sweet was miraculously still resting in his hand! Upon returning to Tāharābād, he reverently gave it to his wife. In due time, she conceived, and after nine months, gave birth to a radiant and divinely endowed son.

This divine child was none other than our revered Mahipati Bova.

From Childhood—Absorbed in Viṭṭhala Bhakti

Born by divine grace, Mahipati Bova showed deep devotion to Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga from early childhood. He would often retreat into solitary places, make cymbals from stones, and lose himself in the chanting of the holy names. At the tender age of five, he insisted on joining his father on the Pāṇḍharpur pilgrimage, and with great affection, his father agreed. Thus, the tradition of Ekādaśī pilgrimage continued into the next generation, fulfilling Dādopant’s prayer.

Renunciation of Government Service

Gifted with a sharp intellect and deep scriptural knowledge, Mahipati mastered Sanskrit, Marathi, Gujarati, and Kannada. He studied the Jnāneśvarī and Tukārām’s Abhaṅgas with profound attention. By age sixteen, he inherited the family duties of kulkaraṇī (village accountant) and joshī (astrologer), serving under a Muslim *jāgīrdār*. But even while performing worldly duties, his heart was fixed on Pāṇḍuraṅga’s lotus feet, observing strict sādhana.

One day, while absorbed in pūjā, a soldier came to summon him to the jāgīrdār’s court. Twice the messenger was sent, but Bova, still immersed in worship, replied, “I shall come once my pūjā is complete.” Irritated, the soldier spoke harshly. Deeply hurt by this insult during his worship, Bova quietly finished his duties, went to the court, and returned home.

That very moment, with tears in his eyes, he laid down his pen at the feet of Lord Viṭṭhala and vowed:

“From this day forward, I shall never again write for worldly service.”

Thus, he gave up his position without regret. Immersed in harināma and bhajana, he was content and fulfilled.

The Dream Instruction from Sant Tukārām

While serving Pāṇḍuraṅga with unwavering devotion, one night Sant Tukārām Mahārāj appeared to him in a dream and, placing his hand upon Mahipati's head, instructed:

"Bova, by the mercy of the Lord, the task of compiling Nāmadeva's abhaṅgas has been fulfilled through me. Now, may the sacred biographies of the saints be revealed through your hands."

From that day onward, inspiration flowed through Mahipati Bova like the Gaṅgā, and he began to compose saintly biographies as his life's mission. He accepted Tukārām Mahārāj as his transcendental guru, considering himself a humble instrument of the divine will.

In his own verses, Mahipati Bova writes:

"He who is the embodiment of bhakti, jnāna, and vairāgya,
who possesses infinite divine qualities—
that sadguru Tukārām has appeared to me in a dream and instructed me."

Why He Wrote Only Saint Biographies

Mahipati Bova's heart overflowed with reverence for the saints, considering them to be moving embodiments of God Himself. In his own words:

"You are the living form of divinity, O saints; thus, I, Mahipati, bow down with heartfelt devotion."

Following this conviction, he dedicated his entire poetic career to glorifying the lives of saints, as did many saint-poets of that era. To them, composing poetry was not for livelihood—it was for union with Śrī Hari and His devotees.

Even Śrī Jnāneśvar in his *Bhāvārtha Dīpikā* had declared:

"To associate with saints is to find what we ourselves have lost."
(*Jnāneśvarī 18.397*)

Mahipati Bova's Sacred Literary Treasury

Kavivarya Mahipati Bova did not merely compose poetry; he manifested a vast, nectarous ocean of saintly glories, each ovī imbued with bhakti-rasa, drawing the reader into deeper sambandha (relationship) with Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga and His dear devotees.

Below is a summary of Bova's principal devotional works, complete with the number of chapters and verses, each a testament to his tireless service:

Granth (Text)	Chapters	Verses (Ovīs)	Year (Śaka)
Śrī Bhaktavijaya	57	9,916	1604
Śrī Kathāsāramṛta	12	7,200	1607
Śrī Santlīlāmṛta	35	5,259	1609
Śrī Bhaktalīlāmṛta	51	10,794	1616
Śrī Santavijaya *(unfinished)*	26	4,628	1616
Śrī Paṇḍharī Māhātmya	12	–	–
Śrī Ananta Vratakathā	–	186	–
Śrī Dattātreya Janma	–	112	–
Śrī Tulasī Māhātmya	5	763	–
Śrī Gaṇeśapurāṇa *(unfinished)*	4	304	–
Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga Stotra	–	108	–
Śrī Muktābharaṇa Vrata	–	101	–
Śrī Ṛṣipancamī Vrata	–	142	–
Aparādha Nivedana Stotra	–	101	–

In addition, Mahipati Bova composed many saints' biographies in abhaṅga metre, expressing his love for devotees such as Śrī Nāmadeva, Śrī Haripāl, Śrī Kamāl, Śrī Narsī Mehtā, Śrī Rākā Kumbhār, Śrī Jagamitra Nāgā, Śrī Māṇkoji Bodhlā, Śrī Santobā Powār, and Śrī Chokhāmela. Often, saints already glorified in his main works were honored again in abhaṅgas—showing his unquenchable devotion to the Vaiṣṇava sants.

The Crown Jewel: Śrī Bhaktalīlāmṛta

Of all his works, Śrī Bhaktalīlāmṛta stands as the largest and most deeply relishable composition, containing 10,794 ovīs. It was completed in the year 1774 CE (Śaka 1696) in Tāharābād, when Bova was sixty years old.

Within its pages, he brings to life, in luminous devotional language, the glories of saints like:

- Śrī Jnāneśvar
- Śrī Chāṅgadeva
- Śrī Nṛsiṁha Sarasvatī
- Śrī Tukārām
- Śrī Ekanātha
- Śrī Bhānudās
- Śrī Santobā Powār

- Śrī Viṭṭhala Purandara
- Śrī Māṇkoji Bodhlā

These narratives are not dry history, but living śravaṇa-kathā, capable of transforming the listener's heart. They reveal lesser-known pastimes, inner realizations, and divine connections between the Lord and His devotees. Simply by reading or hearing these descriptions, one begins to taste the sweetness of the path of bhakti and gradually perceives the mystery of the Lord's mercy.

Mahipati Bova completed this mahāgranth in a mood of pure sevā, not to gain fame or wealth. In fact, in the final verses of the book, he writes:

"I desire neither bhukti (worldly pleasures) nor mukti (liberation).
My only prayer is this: let me eternally glorify the Lord's devotees!"
(*Bhaktalīlāmṛta 51.227*)

And again:

"I care not for impersonal brahma-jnāna,
Nor do I seek yogic siddhis or formless meditations.
I desire only the darśana of Your beautiful, personal form—
Nothing else do I ask, O Śrīpati!"
(*Bhaktalīlāmṛta 51.330*)

These verses shine with Vaiṣṇava siddhānta: devotion to the personal form of Bhagavān, abhorrence of nirguṇa mokṣa, and total dedication to saguṇa sevā of the Lord and His devotees.

A Life of Compassion and Devotion

Though a great scholar and poet, Mahipati Bova was also a living embodiment of humility, compassion, and saintly conduct. When a devastating famine known as *"Karṇḍyācē Sāl"* struck Maharashtra, thousands were afflicted by hunger and thirst.

Moved by their suffering, Bova, inspired by the principle of *ātmavat sarvabhūteṣu* ("see others as oneself"), gave away his entire household supplies to the needy, allowing them to take what they needed freely. When the local jāgīrdār heard of this, he sent Bova carts of grain and goods, but Mahipati Bova, following the example of Sant Tukārām, graciously declined and chose to maintain his life through simple bhikṣā instead.

Such was his commitment to the ideal of renunciation and dependence on Lord Viṭṭhala alone.

His Family and Mahā-Samādhi

Bova was married to Sarasvatībāī, and they had two sons: Viṭṭhala and Nārāyaṇa. He continued to serve Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga with great love until his mahasamādhi in the year 1790 CE (Śaka 1712), on the 12th day of the dark fortnight of Śrāvaṇa. He was 75 years old.

His home in Tāharābād still stands today. Adjacent to it is a beautiful Viṭṭhala temple and his samādhi shrine (Vṛndāvana)—a sacred tirtha for all bhaktas.

Among his descendants, sacred objects such as his wooden writing desk, padukās, spectacles, and a portrait painted by his disciple Keśava Nāyaka are carefully preserved, as relics of a saintly life offered fully to the lotus feet of Viṭṭhala.

Phalaśruti – The Fruits of Reading Mahipati Bova's Works

In the concluding verses of *Śrī Bhaktalīlāmṛta*, Bova promises the divine fruit of hearing and preserving his composition:

"This grantha is meant to lead the devotee to Bhagavān.
Whoever listens or recites it with faith—
The Lord of Rukmiṇī will fulfill their desires.
Keeping this book at home wards off calamities,
And the Sudarśana Cakra itself will guard their household."

"By hearing the lives of saints, the heart is instantly purified.
Malice and hatred vanish from within,
And the jīva crosses over the ocean of material existence."
(*Bhaktalīlāmṛta 51.217–219*)

Conclusion: The Saint Who Made Saints Live Again

Mahipati Bova did not merely write about saints—he became one himself. Through the alchemy of bhakti, humility, and sadācāra, he was transformed into a living associate of those very mahāpuruṣas he glorified. His sweet, nectar-like language, his depth of sentiment, and his philosophical grounding make him not only a poet but a śāstra-kartā in the tradition of Vaiṣṇava paramparā.

Through his works, millions have come closer to Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga. His legacy remains an eternal lamp that illumines the path of devotion, showing us how to love God through loving His devotees.

Let us offer our deepest obeisance at his lotus feet:

"O Kavivarya Mahipati Bova,
You who lit the world with the light of saintly glories—
May we too, by your mercy,
Find shelter at the feet of Śrī Viṭṭhala and His eternal companions."

Chapter 1

Maṅgalācaraṇa – An Auspicious Invocation

With deep reverence, we begin by bowing to Lord Gaṇeśa, the remover of all obstacles. We offer our salutations to Sarasvatī Devī, the goddess of speech and wisdom, who graces the heart with eloquence and divine inspiration. We bow before the revered Guru, the torchbearer of knowledge, to the family deity who guards the lineage, and to our mother and father, who are the first visible gods in our lives.

All glories to Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga, the beloved consort of Rukmiṇī Devī! His form is still and steady, untouched by the waves of change—a perfect embodiment of transcendence. Though He appears in form, He is beyond form, and though He plays with His devotees, He is eternally the Supreme Lord, the primeval origin of all beings.

We glorify Him as the ocean of compassion. His fame is boundless—limitless and without end. So vast and mysterious are His divine pastimes, performed in countless ways, that even the sacred Vedas grow silent, unable to grasp or describe them in full.

Out of love for His pure devotees, He has descended time and again. In ten celebrated incarnations, He destroyed powerful and wicked demons and protected the innocent and the virtuous, always upholding the dharma.

And now, in this dark age of Kali, He has chosen to reside in the humble home of His devotee Puṇḍalīka. There, He stands eternally—on a brick, with hands on His waist—still and patient, awaiting the service of His devotees.

His eyes are gently fixed upon the tip of His nose, yet His inner gaze is full of mercy, ever watching over those who come with faith. To the sincere, He grants His vision, and in moments of crisis, He shields them from the waves of material suffering.

Indeed, it is He who has appeared as Lord Gaṇeśa—Lambodara—the large-bellied one, and the treasure-house of the fourteen branches of knowledge. He also appears as the four-armed warrior, holding the axe (*paraśu*), His entire form smeared with bright vermilion, glowing with auspiciousness.

He joyfully offers the nectar of divine bliss, taking the form of sweet *modakas*—His favorite offering—and shares them lovingly with His devotees. Those blessed souls, having partaken of this *mahāprasāda*, sway in happiness, overwhelmed with love.

When He dances, even Gaṇapati—the master of rhythm and movement—is filled with joy. Lord Śiva Himself, the great lord of Kailāsa, begins to sway in ecstasy. The sixty-four divine

arts, personified, stand in reverence, playing cymbals and melodious *viṇās*, adding their own music to the celebration.

At the time of *kīrtana*, when the Lord stands amidst the devotees, all the celestial beings gather, sitting in silence and devotion. The humble clinking of the water-pots (*ghāgarīs*), carrying the rhythm of praise, humbles even the proudest hearts and fills the air with divine sweetness.

Such is Gaurīkumāra, the son of Goddess Pārvatī—an ocean of virtues and the master of all knowledge. I now pray to Him to grant me fearlessness, so that I may boldly narrate the lives of the saints and bring their glories to light.

And finally, I bow at the feet of Sarasvatī Devī, She who rides the graceful swan, the beloved daughter of Brahmā, and the goddess of divine knowledge and inspiration. From Her flow all the arts and sciences; She is the sovereign of sound and form, and the source of all refined expression.

Clad in pure white garments, she stands resplendent—radiant as the dawn itself. Her forehead bears the deep crimson of sacred *kuṅkuma*, glowing steadily with divine brilliance. Her curly tresses rest gracefully on her crown, while around her neck lies a fragrant garland of flowers, gently swaying atop her chest, revealing both modesty and majesty.

In her hands she holds the divine *Vīṇā*—the instrument of Brahmā—through which she eternally expresses the glories of the Supreme Lord. It is by her boundless grace that poets of every age have found their voice, composing verses infused with devotion, wisdom, and divine insight.

To her I offer my salutations—and now, turning to my master, I bow down to the great **Sadguru Tukārām Mahārāj**, the empowered saint of Kali-yuga. It was he who descended into this world of death, not out of karma, but out of compassion, to reveal to sincere seekers the luminous path of bhakti.

For in this age, austerities like yoga, sacrificial rites, and elaborate vows have lost their potency and purity. But there remains one eternal method by which all may be saved—the chanting of the Lord's holy names. This truth is not mine; it is spoken by Śrī Vyāsa himself in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. *"In Kali-yuga, the only way to liberation is nāma-saṅkīrtana."*

Yet such truths are deep—subtle, and easily missed by those trapped in material ignorance. Therefore, Śrī Tukārām took a divine incarnation, so that through his life and teachings, the seekers of this age might be inspired, corrected, and uplifted.

By embracing nāma-saṅkīrtana with pure devotion, he dissolved the great illusion of material existence. With sincere, loving cries to Pāṇḍuranga, the Lord of Paṇḍharpur, he transformed even his physical body into pure spirit—into divine Brahman.

Seeing this, the Lord Rukmiṇīkānta became pleased beyond measure. Death itself bowed before the power of his devotion. In that same body—without casting it aside—the Lord took Tukārām straight to Vaikuṇṭha, defying the laws of Kali-yuga.

But even this miracle did not silence worldly pride. His sacred *abhaṅgas*, so lovingly composed, were mocked and rejected by orthodox brāhmaṇas. They were cast into the river, thought to be lost forever. Yet, after thirteen days, by the mercy of Paṇḍuranga Himself, those very writings returned—untouched, preserved—testifying to their divine origin.

Tukārām was not merely a saint; he was a living embodiment of bhakti, jnāna, and vairāgya. The divine qualities in him were countless. And such a Sadguru, through compassion alone, made a connection with one as unworthy as myself—even appearing in dreams to offer instruction.

I confess from my heart: I am lowly, insignificant, and lacking in all virtue. Yet somehow, for reasons known only to him, he chose to bestow grace upon me. Perhaps it was no merit of mine—just the mystery of his boundless compassion.

Just as the sun dispels darkness, though it did not cause it,
Just as the philosopher's stone transforms iron without effort,
Leaving not a trace of blackness behind—
So too does the Sadguru transform the soul.

And just as impure waters, when touched by the flow of the Gaṅgā,
Become sacred and worshipped by sages—
So too, through the touch of the Guru's mercy,
Even the fallen are lifted to divine status.

Through this mercy, ignorance was burned away; wisdom took its place.
Even the subtle pride of being a 'knower' vanished,
Replaced by genuine humility and spiritual insight.

Just as the Gaṅgā, upon merging with the sea,
Loses her name and form and becomes one with the ocean—
Or like fire consuming fuel, then extinguishing itself—
Such was the effect of the Guru's intervention in my heart.

He eradicated all ignorance and revealed true knowledge.
And now, dwelling always within me,
He inspires and speaks through me—
Telling the divine stories of the Lord and His saints.

At the outset of this sacred composition, I bow to the great poets of ancient times—those seers whose verses became the foundation of the scriptures. Through their words, the path across this ocean of material existence was illuminated.

Sage Vālmīki, the divine poet, wove the vast story of Śrī Rāma into a ship,
Granting countless souls safe passage across the turbulent seas of saṁsāra.
Even before the Lord's birth on earth, he had already sung of His pastimes—
Such was his foresight, his divine inspiration.
His verses number in the millions, and at his lotus feet, I bow.

Then came Vyāsadeva, the son of Satyavatī,
Who, churning the ocean of Vedic wisdom,
Gave birth to the Mahābhārata—
A scripture unmatched in breadth and depth.
To him, Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, I offer my reverence.

And to Vasiṣṭha, from whose spiritual lineage Vyāsa appeared,
I offer full, eight-limbed prostrations.
May their blessings bring perfection to this humble work.

Now, I offer my respects to the vernacular saints—those divine incarnations
Who graced this land with sacred literature in the common tongue.
Their fame spread far and wide, their impact eternal.

To Śrī Jnāneśvara, the direct incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu,
A yogī of sublime realization,
Who unlocked the deepest truths of the Bhagavad-gītā
And revealed them to the world in simple Marathi—
I bow with all my heart.

When brāhmaṇas in Paithan persecuted him,
He made even a buffalo recite the Vedas!
When the proud yogī Changadeva approached on a tiger,
Jnāneśvar calmly rode a stone wall to meet him—
His spiritual power beyond all comprehension.

To his siblings—Nivṛtti, Sopān, and Muktābāī—
All exalted saints and liberated souls—
I offer my humble salutations again and again.

Then came Nāmadeva, the direct incarnation of Uddhava,
Who appeared in this very Kali-yuga.
He composed over a hundred crore *abhaṅgas*,
Simple in language, yet profound in truth.
To him I offer loving prostrations.

To Ekanātha, the full-knowing saint born in Pratiṣṭhāna,
Who worshipped Viṣṇu and served even brāhmaṇas with humility,
Considering himself forever indebted to the Lord—
I bow down in gratitude.

When the four Kumāras beheld his devotion,
Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself lifted the water-pots for him,
Helping him draw water with a smile—
Such was the sweetness of his bhakti.

To Mukundarāja, who authored *Vivekasindhu*,
A deep metaphysical ocean of truth,
And to Dāsopant, favored by Lord Dattātreya,
I offer heartfelt reverence.

To Samarth Rāmadās, the incarnation of Hanumān,
Who appeared in tangible form and composed the *Dāsbodh*,
Greatly expanding the bhakti tradition—
I bow in awe and admiration.

To Muktēśvara, a treasure-house of poetic skill,
Renowned among all,
Whose commentaries on Sanskrit texts
Delight the ears and nourish the soul—
To him, too, I offer my deep salutations.

Among the exalted poets, there was Vāmana Svāmī, a scholar of extraordinary acumen. The verses he composed are unparalleled in depth and elegance. With deep devotion, he translated the sacred *Dāśama Skandha*—the Tenth Canto of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa—into the vernacular, pouring into it his love for the Lord and his command of language.

And what of Śrīdhara Svāmī of Nājarē, also known as Śrīdhara Samartha? He gave us marvelous compositions—*Harivijaya*, *Rāmavijaya*, and *Pāṇḍava Pratāpa*—literary jewels in the treasury of bhakti. Out of devotion, he remained at Paṇḍharpur, the abode of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga, ever immersed in divine remembrance.

To such saints—well known and glorified in all corners of the land,
The architects of these divine scriptures—
I fall at their feet again and again,
Prostrating with reverence and heartfelt gratitude.

May they bless me—this lowly one—
And help me bring this humble composition to completion.
Just as a poor man hosts a feast but needs the help of wealthy patrons

To provide the ingredients,
I, too, depend on the saints for the wealth of spiritual language.

For I am without refinement of intellect.
I do not understand the subtle qualities of poetic expression.
Yet I have begun this work,
Relying solely on the grace and inspiration of the saints.

Each letter, each syllable I write,
Is a beggar's plea—
An offering granted only through your kindness,
O saints and listeners.
Only by your blessings can my words become sweet,
And bring joy to the hearts of the devotees.

Consider a child—
Unable to comprehend the labor behind a delicious meal.
And yet, the mother, full of affection,
Places the bite lovingly in his mouth.
Just so, the saints recall verses from their vast memory
And feed them to a fool like me, who can barely hold a pen.

Dear listeners, noble and virtuous,
I now offer you my salutations.
You have come with sharp ears and pure hearts
To hear these sacred narratives—
May you focus your minds and dive into their meaning.

Even if the audience is sometimes restless,
Even if their attention wavers—
If the speaker's love is true,
That affection alone melts hearts.

What use is offering beauty to a eunuch?
Or sweet confections to the fevered?
What is the point of singing to the deaf?
The speaker's joy lies only in the hearer's engagement.

Showing a mirror to the blind is meaningless.
In the same way, one who has no taste for spiritual hearing
Is like stone—
Unmoved, untouched.

But may you not be like that, dear listeners.
Instead, understand the heart of the speaker—

Even if his skill is lacking,
He speaks with deep devotion and purpose.

Though you may judge me unqualified—
And indeed, I confess, I am slow and dull—
Still, I try to arrange this garland of words
With faith, not perfection.

I have washed the feet of the great poets
With the waters of devotion,
And sipped that sacred *tīrtha* as my only qualification.
It is by their grace alone that I speak anything worthwhile.

Just as a student, unlearned,
Goes from home to home in the city,
Begging alms,
So too, his hunger may be satisfied,
But the cooking fire never burns in his own home.

That is my state.
Though I speak, I possess not even a single letter.
Wandering from saint to saint, from door to door,
I gather the food of wisdom
To nourish my soul and feed the listeners.

And yet, the food received as alms is supremely sacred—
So declare the learned sages.
If a sincere sādhaka serves with faith,
His understanding expands beyond imagination.

So, to those who truly desire
To attain the Lord Śrī Hari—
To those whose hearts yearn for divine union—
Let them listen attentively to the lives of the saints.

In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa declares
The qualities of His devotees—
In the Eleventh Chapter, and again in the Twelfth,
He praises those who walk the path of love and surrender.

To reveal those very qualities through living example,
The Lord Himself has incarnated
In the form of saints in this age of Kali.

These saints live among us—
Not hidden, but fully visible.
They shine as lights for the world,
Guiding all souls, both near and far.

Even after thoroughly examining all alternatives, some people still focus only on faults, their vision tainted with criticism. But how can any fault be visible in the saints, the pure-hearted servants of the Lord? And if such doubt arises in someone's mind, there is a deeper reason behind it—listen and understand it well.

Just as a mother delights in dressing her child with fine clothes and ornaments, yet when fearing the evil eye, she may smear a touch of ash or dirt on the child's face—so too, the Supreme Lord sometimes allows His dearest devotees to exhibit some apparent fault, only to shield them from worldly praise or pride.

Although such devotees are fixed in bhakti, jnāna, and vairāgya, and are dear to the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, He may place an apparent blemish upon them—lest society glorifies them excessively, leading to envy or speculation.

A mother sees a dark mark on her child's face and says, "It was I who put it there." Similarly, the compassionate Lord of all does not consider the faults or merits of His devotees, for to Him, their surrender is everything.

To explain this truth, listen now to an example well-known in the Purāṇas: Sage Nārada, though a revered Vaiṣṇava saint, was once tested and made to stumble—just so that others might learn.

Or consider the mighty Hanumān, supreme devotee of Lord Rāma—yet Rāma would not rely even for a moment on him during critical times, for Hanumān was after all of the monkey species, given to childlike pranks.

Garuda, the divine carrier of Lord Viṣṇu, ever present at His side—yet it is said he once consumed snakes, and even then, the Lord of the universe did not reject him.

Detractors ignore virtues and exaggerate some natural quirks. They are like sieves that sift out all the flour, keeping only the coarse husk.

But let this discussion end here—for even the goddess of speech would tire describing the greatness of saints.

Know this well: the saints who descend among us are not like ordinary people. Just as the Ganges is no mere river—she dwells eternally at Lord Viṣṇu's feet and destroys all sin by mere sight—so too are the forms of the saints: powerful and purifying.

We should not call a philosopher's stone an ordinary rock; nor compare Lord Viṣṇu's incarnations to mere animals. Varāha is not just a boar. He is the Lord who uplifted the earth. To call Him a pig is foolishness.

The Lord who appeared from a pillar is not just a lion—He is Nṛsiṁha Himself. Though He took the form of a brāhmaṇa dwarf, He is not merely a beggar—He is Vāmana, the Supreme Being.

Not all brāhmaṇas are wrathful like Paraśurāma. Not all kings are like Rāma, who rescued the world by merely taking His name.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa may appear like a cowherd, but He is the Supreme Absolute Truth—Parabrahman. Similarly, saints may appear human to our eyes, but in truth, they are not ordinary at all.

They take birth in this world only to glorify Lord Hari, and to deliver the suffering souls by spreading divine wisdom and chanting of His holy names. For this purpose alone, do these saintly souls descend—there is no other reason.

The Supreme Lord of Paṇḍharpur devised a clever plan: He placed Himself behind the scenes and made me the instrument to narrate these glories in the Śrī Bhaktavijaya.

And when that work was completed, He inspired the creation of yet another nectar-like scripture—the Sant-līlāmṛta-sāra, for many divine stories still remained untold.

Still, so many more saintly pastimes remained. Thus, on Lord Viṭṭhala's instruction, another composition was begun—Bhaktalīlāmṛta, to continue revealing this ocean of divine bhakti.

At this point, listeners might wonder: "Why narrate these saintly stories again in another text? Why not just one complete book?"

To answer this, let us consider this: the glories of the devotees of the Lord are boundless. Like the mighty wind that no one can bind, their tales arise spontaneously from divine will.

Just as wind is directed by the spinning fan, so too are the narratives guided by the Lord's desire. And since the pastimes of Lord Hari are many, and the viewpoints of ṛṣis varied, Vyāsadeva composed the eighteen Purāṇas to accommodate it all.

Even those eighteen weren't enough—for the qualities of the Infinite Lord cannot be contained. So further Upapurāṇas were written by the sage Dvaipāyana.

Although there is only one original Veda, it was divided into four branches, as no single brāhmaṇa could grasp it all. Likewise, the Rāmāyaṇa was composed in seven kāṇḍas by Vālmīki for the sake of easier comprehension.

The Mahābhārata, covering profound truths and the tales of Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas, is so vast that no one can claim to grasp it fully. Thus, even that was split into eighteen parvas by Vyāsa, who is none other than Nārāyaṇa Himself.

In this age of Kali, countless pure-hearted devotees have arisen, embodying sattva-guṇa, subduing their passions, and capturing the heart of Lord Kṛṣṇa with their devotion. Their stories cannot be understood in one sitting, so whenever inspiration came, these tales were written and preserved.

Therefore, the saintly pastimes have been shared in multiple scriptures. Upon hearing this explanation, the listeners were deeply satisfied and their doubts vanished. They praised the wisdom of the great poet who conveyed this understanding.

Now, leaving aside all other praises, the poet focused his mind and offered respectful obeisances to the Lord's devotees, saying: "O noble ones, listen with undivided attention."

In this dark age of Kali, all dharma has nearly vanished. There is no means of deliverance except the holy name. Therefore, the Supreme Lord issued an instruction:

"O My dear devotees, you must now descend into the world. Sing My glories. Establish the path of devotion through name and form."

Without nāma-smaraṇa, there is no hope in Kali-yuga. Hearing this, the Lord reclining on Śeṣa immediately bowed to His own devotees.

They responded, "O Sustainer of the Universe, You took ten incarnations in the past, vanquishing demons and establishing dharma."

"Now it is our turn to perform this work. By conquering the six enemies—lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride, and envy—we shall establish the nectar of divine name on this earth."

With these words, the devotees bowed to the consort of Lakṣmī and took birth on earth to redeem the world.

Their stories were already spoken by Śrī Vyāsa in the Bhaviṣyottara Purāṇa, but that scripture remains hidden in Lord Śiva's abode on Mount Kailāsa.

Just as Vālmīki had already written Śrī Rāma's life story before it occurred, so too did Vyāsa foresee the descent of these saints and record their divine activities long before they manifested.

But that sacred scripture has not yet been fully revealed to this world—it remains in Kailāsa. Therefore, the glorious lives of saints, though hidden and profound, have become known through divine inspiration.

Let there be no doubt in your heart, O listener; the truth of this account shall now be made clear. In the sacred land of Bhāratavarṣa—Hindusthān—there lived a great Vaiṣṇava by the name of Nabhājī. This revered soul composed the hallowed *Bhaktamāla*, a garland of saintly lives, written in the Gwalior dialect with deep conviction and clarity.

Based upon Nabhājī's sacred composition, the present narrative, *Bhaktalīlāmṛta*, is recited. Yet some listeners, filled with questions, raise their doubts before the speaker. "Who was this Nabhājī? What practices and vows did he observe? How did he come to compose such detailed accounts of saintly lives? Through whose grace did this knowledge arise?"

In response, it is explained: Nabhājī hailed from the spiritual lineage of the revered Rāmānanda Svāmī, a powerful renunciate and spiritual master who resided in Vārāṇasī. Rāmānanda Svāmī was a great ascetic, a mahāsamartha, firmly rooted in bhakti (devotion), jnāna (spiritual wisdom), and vairāgya (renunciation). One of his foremost disciples was Ānandānanda Svāmī, who accepted him as his guru with complete surrender.

From this illustrious line came another disciple—Pohrīdās—whose two prominent followers were known as Agrjī and Kiljī. Both were profoundly learned and spiritually adept, but among them, Agrjī stood out. Elder and steadfast, he was deeply detached from worldly affairs, ever absorbed in the loving remembrance of Lord Viṣṇu. With pure heart, he sang the glories of the Lord with deep devotion.

He was a sage of immense tranquility and the very embodiment of spiritual radiance. He worshipped the Garuḍa-emblemed Lord Viṣṇu with spontaneous devotion and love. His eloquence and intelligence were such that his speech rivaled Bṛhaspati, the guru of the gods. Yet, despite his brilliance, humility adorned him like a garland. He saw the same soul present in all beings and was utterly free from duality. Even noble kings and powerful rulers bowed respectfully before his feet, touched by his genuine devotion.

His disciple, Prabodhinī Padmahastī, carried his message far and wide, inspiring many toward the path of bhakti. Agradās himself was meticulous in daily rituals like bathing and prayer, remaining pure both inwardly and outwardly. He practiced and taught the ninefold process of devotion—hearing, chanting, remembering the Lord, serving His feet, worship, offering prayers, servitude, friendship, and complete surrender of the self.

He practiced each form of devotion deeply, yet such perfection is rare indeed. Though past scriptures speak of these practices with grandeur, it is in the current age of Kali that remembrance of the Lord (*smaraṇa*) alone has uplifted countless fallen souls. Thus, Agrjī engaged ceaselessly in divine remembrance (*bhajana*), day and night, with unshakable love.

Witnessing his intense love, the Lord Himself granted him direct vision. Rukmiṇī's beloved, Lord Kṛṣṇa in His saguṇa (personal) form, began to meet Agradās regularly. Whenever Agradās walked anywhere, Kṛṣṇa followed him like a humble servant. The Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, hungry for love, was drawn irresistibly toward the affection of His devotee. Without that pure love, the Lord had no taste for even majestic opulence.

Indeed, all religious practices—chanting, austerities, vows, rituals—are only meaningful when infused with genuine feeling (*bhāva*). Without this internal mood of devotion, even elaborate worship is but empty show. Yoga, too, without devotion, leads not to perfection. To such practitioners, even gods like Indra send obstacles.

The Vedas, scriptures, and Purāṇas all declare that without bhakti, all efforts are fruitless. One may wander to every tīrtha (sacred place), yet if devoid of devotion, no true fruit is gained. Even the chanting of the Lord's name, if lacking devotion, is as barren as a herder's cry. Poetic flair without bhakti cannot bring true glory—it remains superficial. Even if one masters lofty spiritual texts and metaphysics, it is all in vain without loving devotion. The learned may abound in argument and knowledge, but without sweetness of heart, their learning is hollow.

In contrast, Agradās was a true Vaiṣṇava—humble, loving, and filled with prema-bhakti. Through the deep sentiment of devotion, he brought the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha under his control. Bhakti, jnāna, and vairāgya—these three were the precious ornaments he wore, and thus the Lord, the very life of the universe, granted him direct darśana.

It was during such a blessed time that a severe famine befell the land. In a time of harsh famine, a mother, overwhelmed by hunger and despair, wandered with her infant in search of food. Finding none, and unable to bear her child's cries, she approached the banks of the sacred Gaṅgā River, pretending to seek alms. There, distracted by the bustle and divine atmosphere, she left her tender son playing and vanished without a trace, abandoning him completely. Just like a deer that flees into the forest, forsaking its helpless fawn, so too did she disappear, leaving the infant to fate.

The tiny child, hungry and bewildered, cried out repeatedly for his mother, invoking her name in many ways. At that very moment, a saintly Vaiṣṇava named **Agradās** was bathing nearby in the Gaṅgā. Hearing the feeble sobs of the child, he became deeply moved. Approaching him gently, he inquired, "Why do you cry so pitifully, my dear child? Tell me what troubles you."

The child replied in innocence, "I was asking my mother for food, and she left me and went away." Hearing this heart-wrenching response, compassion welled up in Agradās' heart. He consoled the boy, offering soothing words and comfort, saying, "Do not be afraid, my child. You are safe now." Henceforth, he named the child Nabhājī and brought him into his āśrama.

Agradās was a revered Vaiṣṇava Mahant known for feeding the hungry and caring for all beings as manifestations of the Lord. At his maṭha, food was regularly offered to the Lord with devotion, and the remnants were distributed to all, including sannyāsīs, sādhus, and the poor. Nabhājī too began to partake of these sanctified remnants—the Lord's prasāda—and thus survived.

However, some skeptical individuals questioned the boy's origins, speculating that he may be the abandoned son of a courtesan, unsure of his caste or heritage. Out of caution, the maṭha caretakers built a small hut for him in the outer courtyard. Though isolated physically,

he was spiritually nurtured. Daily, he was fed with the sanctified remnants from the sādhu's meals, and he observed the rituals of deity worship from a distance.

Nabhājī's Transformation and Spiritual Awakening

Even as a child, Nabhājī showed extraordinary signs of spiritual insight. Standing outside, he would absorb the sublime beauty of Śrī Viṣṇu's form and qualities as worshiped through ṣoḍaśopacāra-pūjā (sixteen-fold worship). He would offer obeisances to all the Vaiṣṇavas returning home and honor the Lord's remnants with full faith, knowing that nothing was more sanctifying than that prasāda.

Through the power of association with saints and the constant hearing of Bhāgavata-kathā, all his impurities were burned away, and divine knowledge manifested in him. Nabhājī developed a mystical insight—he could perceive others' hearts without them speaking. He understood past and future events and could even hear sounds from the celestial realms, though he remained quiet and humble, never boasting.

A Vision Beyond the Visible

One day, Agradās performed his daily Gaṅgā bath and began his worship with focused mind. He performed manasika-pūjā (mental worship), wrapping a cotton cloth around himself, and sat absorbed in meditative devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He instructed the maṭha attendants not to allow anyone inside during this time. Meanwhile, Nabhājī was seated respectfully at the door.

While Agradās was deep in meditation, Nabhājī suddenly spoke, "A ship is sinking in the ocean. A merchant is in grave distress. He is now praying to Lord Dvārakādheśa: 'If I am saved, I vow to offer one-fifth of my wealth to Agradās.'" The boy revealed that the Lord had personally intervened to save the ship, and this was why Agradās was unable to focus fully—because the Lord Himself was engaged in fulfilling the merchant's prayer.

Hearing this, Agradās was astonished. Just then, he perceived through divine vision that the deity of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who was adorned in yellow garments, had returned, dripping with water from the ocean. Realizing the truth of Nabhājī's words, Agradās fell flat in prostration and joyfully asked, "O Mādhava, where had You gone during my worship?"

The Lord smiled and replied with divine sweetness, "I was fulfilling the vow made by My devotee. He promised to give you a portion of his wealth if saved, so I went to rescue his ship." The Lord then revealed that the merchant would soon send the promised donation and that Agradās' service of feeding the sādhus and maintaining the maṭha would continue unhindered.

The Command to Glorify the Devotees

Once the pūjā was complete, Agradās invited Nabhājī inside and asked, "How did you know all this?" Nabhājī humbly replied, "This is the mercy of the sādhu-saṅga and the power of the prasāda. Through your shelter, my heart is being purified."

Pleased, Agradās instructed him, "O dear child, you must now glorify the Lord's devotees. Describe the greatness of the saints who have come in all four yugas. There is no greater way to cross this ocean of birth and death than by hearing about the bhaktas of the Lord."

Thus, Nabhājī bowed in submission to his guru's command and began compiling the Bhaktamāla, describing the lives of the great devotees across time. He began his work in the local language of Gwalior and later elaborated on it through the insights of his guru, the tradition of Vaiṣṇava ācāryas, and the inspiration he received from Lord Rukmiṇīramaṇa Himself.

He clarified that his writing was not based merely on personal opinion but on realized truth, accessible only to those graced by divine insight.

The Humble Prelude to the Glorious Lives of Saints

The narrator gently counsels: *"Even if doubts arise in the heart, one should turn to the ancient tales and hear them with a receptive mind."* Just as the great Rāmāyaṇa arose from the life of Vālmīki, who was once a highway robber, and as the Mahābhārata would not exist without the sage Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, so too, the lives of saintly souls often emerge from mysterious and humble beginnings.

Therefore, the poet explains, it is only fitting that the humble origins of the saints and their servants be narrated first. Understanding this viewpoint of the poet, the hearts of the listeners swelled with love and eagerness. They exclaimed with joy, *"Your divine analogies and insightful replies have greatly pleased us!"*

Encouraged by their enthusiasm, the poet resolved: *"Let us now abandon all extended preambles and immediately begin recounting the glorious lives of the saints!"*

Observing the deep eagerness in the listeners' hearts, the narrator bowed down in reverence to them. He said humbly, *"Though it is Lord Rukmiṇīpati Himself who compels me to narrate this sacred work, I am but a dull-witted and ignorant servant."*

The narrator acknowledged, *"It is He—the ocean of mercy, the liberator of the fallen—who inspires even this limited, worldly tongue to speak. Therefore, O sādhus and saintly listeners, please hear these words with loving ears and open hearts."*

Just as a starving man finds sweetness even in dry food, so too does one whose heart cries out with longing relish these stories of the Lord's devotees. On the other hand, those whose hearts remain unmoved—even if they hear endless tales—will retain nothing in memory. Such people are entangled in the mud of worldly life.

But you, the noble listeners, are not of that kind. You are expert seekers of transcendental wisdom, noble and discriminating. Whatever is lacking, you will complete with your pure intellect and sāttvika nature. This alone is your noble quality.

The poet assures that in the coming chapters, the nectar of rasa—sweet, wonderful, and astonishing—will flow abundantly, as narrated by Śrī Rukmiṇīkānta, the Lord of the goddess of fortune. Even the king, who heard these narratives, endorsed them with his royal seal, repeating the words with devotion and joy.

Thus concludes the first chapter of the sacred "Bhakta-līlāmṛta"—the nectarous chronicle of the Lord's devotees. Hearing this text is itself the fulfillment of all desires. This chapter, rich in rasa and divine affection, is the beginning of a stream of love for the hearts of sincere devotees.

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Chapter 2

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ.

All glories to the Lord of all gods, Rukmiṇī's beloved, the compassionate guardian of the helpless!

O Lord Nārāyaṇa! In my foolishness, I consider myself greater than all in ignorance. I possess no feeling, no devotion, no knowledge, no renunciation. I do not even know how to worship or perform arcana; indeed, I am fallen in every way.

The sacred scriptures elude my understanding, and I grasp nothing of the divine language. Yet, You, O Viṭṭhobā, the inner witness of all, know my soul entirely.

Despite my unworthiness, a peculiar wind stirred within me—an inspiration to compile a sacred book. I undertook this effort taking exclusive refuge in You.

Just as the celestial Mount Meru is upheld by the wind, so too do I seek You, O Lord, as the sole support of my faltering intellect.

Just as ships navigate the ocean solely depending on the sea, and sages act righteously guided by Vedic declarations—so too, I begin this narration of saintly lives, sustained by Your grace alone, O Pāṇḍuraṅga.

A blade of grass does not move on its own; it dances only by the touch of wind. Similarly, my words are not mine, but instruments played by the breath You inspire. I merely speak as the flute sings when blown—empty in itself, yet filled with meaning when touched by breath.

I, who am of dull intellect, know well my limitations. Yet, You, O magnanimous King, are known as the granter of boons. Buoyed by this thought, I have taken the liberty to begin this *Śrī Bhaktalīlāmṛta*, and I now pray—may it reach its rightful conclusion by Your mercy.

Now, dear listeners, hear a tale from the heavenly regions.

Once in Svarga, while cooking for the gods, a wind-god (*marudgaṇa*) was assigned a task by his master. But due to negligence, he failed. Lord Indra, enraged, cursed him: "O proud and inattentive one! Since you do not serve your master with devotion, fall swiftly to the realm of mortals and take birth as a human!"

Shocked and repentant, the wind-god clasped his hands in submission and recited a melodious hymn: "Victory to You, O consort of Śacī! You are the jeweled crest of all the gods. By Your command, the clouds quench the earth's thirst. To uphold Your honor, even

Lord Viṣṇu incarnated as Vāmana and sent Bali to the netherworld. Please, O Lord, glance mercifully upon me and mitigate this curse. Show me the way to liberation in my human birth."

Hearing these words, Lord Indra was pacified, just as a mother first scolds her child in anger and later explains lovingly. He softened and spoke: "To uplift the world, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva will incarnate in the age of Kali. The primal energy, Yogamāyā Herself, will descend in the form of a liberated soul.

Nivṛtti, a king of ascetics, shall embody Rudra. Jnāndev will be none other than Mahāviṣṇu. The complete incarnation of Brahmā will be born as Sopān. Take exclusive refuge in these beings, and your liberation shall be ensured.

Through the merit of saintly association, you will gain proficiency in spiritual knowledge. The illusion of duality shall vanish, and you will behold the cosmic form pervading all beings.

By the mercy of a genuine spiritual teacher, you will attain self-realization. All creation—moving and unmoving—will appear to you as Brahman.

The Supreme Brahman Himself, in the form of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga standing on a brick by the Bhīmā riverbank, shall be worshipped by you from the heart. He will then remove all obstacles from your path.

You shall live as a householder, beget a noble family line, and after leaving your body, attain the wealth of samādhi. Thereafter, you shall return to your original divine abode. These words are true and unerring."

Upon hearing this promise from Lord Indra, the wind-god was consoled and offered his obeisances. His celestial form then began its descent to Earth. As he descended, his effulgent body lit up the sky, and the night gave way to a divine dawn.

Thus was born the deva, now known as Upadeva, upon this mortal realm.

He took birth near the sacred confluence of the Tapatī and Payoṣṇī rivers, where thick groves of banana and flowering trees adorned the banks. The air was fragrant with jasmine, jui, pārijāt, champā, and bakul flowers. Swarms of bees buzzed joyously amidst this paradise.

This holy land lay in Khāndesh—sanctified by saints, cooled by the sacred waters, and destined to become the stage for the Lord's divine play through His saintly servant.

After descending to Earth, the celestial wind-god took immediate refuge at the sacred confluence of rivers. Bathing in their holy waters, he settled quietly in a forest of banana trees near the riverbanks. There, he began his intense spiritual practices (*anushṭhāna*) with great love and focus. Though he appeared blind, his inner vision was awake. He spoke to no one, and people believed he was merely a sightless ascetic.

Nearby villagers noticed him but couldn't discern his origin. They saw an extraordinarily radiant figure, luminous and serene. His divine presence was unmatched among mortals—his beauty, glow, and composure left onlookers stunned. None knew where he came from, but his calm demeanor and spiritual discipline earned him a name: **Chāṅgadeva**.

The Brahmin Brothers' Devotion

At that time, two Brahmin brothers from the village of Varuṇa heard of this ascetic's glory. Inspired, they decided to visit him with deep devotion in their hearts. Carrying garlands of tulsi and fragrant flowers, along with dates and other simple offerings, they approached Chāṅgadeva, bowed to him, and stood awestruck at the sight of his divine form.

They said to one another, "Blessed is the day we beheld such a divine soul. Surely, he is not a mere human—his form must have descended from the heavens."

Observing him closely, they noticed all 32 auspicious bodily marks (*lakṣaṇas*) found in great beings. Their faith deepened, and they became convinced that Chāṅgadeva was an avatar meant to uplift the world.

With reverence, they stayed near him, offering service daily. Whatever food or materials he needed, they brought without delay. Even during his nightly rest, the brothers would gently massage his feet.

As a month passed in this way, their hearts yearned for more than service—they desired his spiritual grace. One day, they humbly pleaded: "Please, Swāmī, bestow your *anugraha* (blessing) upon us. Only through your grace can we be liberated from this worldly bondage."

Chāṅgadeva, still immersed in his asceticism, hesitated. "I do not know the way of granting blessings," he said. "I am a blind man abandoned in the forest. I know nothing of rituals, mantras, or worldly identity. I have no home, no family, no social ties."

He encouraged them to find another great soul, saying, "You are noble and pure. Find a true teacher, one suited to your needs."

But the brothers persisted. "Our only resolve is to take refuge at your feet. We will not leave without your grace."

Chāṅgadeva tested them gently. He warned of the pitfalls of devotion mixed with desires—for wealth, recognition, or worldly gain. He explained that:

- A devotee whose mind clings to material desire is not dear to God.
- Desire-driven devotion fades with time.
- True grace flows to those who are selfless, detached, and pure in heart.

Even if a desire-filled person renounces clothes and roams like an ascetic, the Lord remains distant from them. In contrast, a humble householder who chants with love is always protected by Śrīhari.

Moved by their sincerity, Chāṅgadeva finally relented. He placed water on their heads, initiated them with a sacred mantra, and instructed them in the practice of constant remembrance (*nāmasmaraṇa*). With hearts brimming with joy, the brothers now served with unwavering love day and night.

Seven months passed this way. One day, they approached Chāṅgadeva again, confiding: "We are bound to household life, suffering from lack of food and constant debt. Despite all our efforts, we cannot make ends meet. Now, weary of the world, we've surrendered at your feet."

Hearing their plight, Chāṅgadeva's heart melted.

He inquired about their trade, and they explained that they tried selling cloth in the weekly market, but with little success. Chāṅgadeva, moved by compassion, told them: "Go to the next market. Take me with you. Let us see what the Lord wills."

On the next Monday, market day, they joyfully placed Chāṅgadeva on a seat atop a horse. His very presence seemed to bring wealth and prosperity.

As soon as they arrived at the market, customers flocked to their stall. Whatever cloth they had was sold instantly—and not just sold, but at double the profit! Their disbelief turned to elation.

Falling at Chāṅgadeva's feet, they said, "This is your grace alone. We are merely your instruments."

Chāṅgadeva humbly replied, "It is not I, but the Lord who responds to sincere devotion. When the heart is pure, the divine provides."

He continued, teaching them: "A true saint may possess all powers (*siddhis*), but he attributes nothing to himself. He keeps 'I am Brahman' thoughts far from his ego. Even if one can perform miracles, if he does so with pride or desire, he remains far from liberation."

True saints don't seek fame or flaunt their powers. They remain immersed in devotion, content in service, attributing everything to God.

Life settled into a new rhythm. The brothers resumed their household duties but made time daily for the guru's service. Chāṅgadeva, too, resumed his rituals—fashioning a small Śiva-linga from earth and offering worship with incense, lamps, and food. His praise of Lord Śiva echoed with love and reverence.

The brothers cooked for him, served him lovingly, and cherished the rare grace of living with a realized master.

As dawn broke the next day, Chāṅgadeva departed for the forest once more, leaving behind a legacy of transformation.

The brothers continued their service, their hearts now overflowing with both material abundance and spiritual wealth. And as long as they kept faith in the guru, hardship never touched them again.

Once, there lived a poor but devout brāhmaṇa couple, devoted to their **sadguru**. Through their unwavering **guru-sevā**, even amidst hardship, they experienced a miraculous transformation in their destiny. Their dire poverty dissolved; the burden of debts was lifted, and peace, prosperity, and wealth began to pour into their household. In just one year, they rose from destitution to become immensely wealthy—**lakṣādhipatis**, lords of great fortune.

With their newfound affluence, they constructed a grand temple in their town and adorned their home with ornaments and opulence. Once content with a life of austerity and service, their minds now began to find joy in worldly pleasures. Their fame spread throughout the region, and many esteemed relatives and friends began to seek their company. As is often the case when wealth arrives, honor followed. Their home became a place of celebration, admiration, and grandeur.

But amid this prosperity, a subtle shift occurred. Their minds, once absorbed in **sadguru-sevā**, now became absorbed in **saṁsāra**—worldly life. They began to drift away from their spiritual path. Even their visits to their guru became irregular, as the intoxication of wealth pulled them into a vortex of enjoyment. Their detachment faded, and in time, their very consciousness began to change. The wise sage **Chāṅgadeva** perceived this with deep insight.

Chāṅgadeva reflected, "**Gold and women are the two greatest obstacles for the sādhaka.** When they appear suddenly, even a well-established practitioner loses touch with his true dharma." Just as a wayward child tarnishes the honor of even the noblest mother, so too can a spouse's enticements draw a man into sense enjoyment. The once-sincere disciples, having acquired wealth, now forgot their **sadguru** and became engrossed in sensual and domestic life.

Like water extinguishing fire, their spiritual vitality was quenched. The very mantras given by the guru were now neglected. The once-poor brāhmaṇa, having received **mahā-siddhi** from the guru, now failed to maintain even basic spiritual duties. Forgetfulness enveloped him; he began to show anger even when someone didn't offer him materials for worship.

Witnessing this decline, the **sadguru**—full of compassion—distanced himself. For this very reason, **true sādhus remain detached**, often choosing to live alone in the forest. As

Chāṅgadeva reflected, "People's minds are fickle. It is difficult to find one-pointed devotion. That is why the wise do not grow attached to anyone, for **paramārtha** is the ultimate aim."

When one is attached to sense pleasures, **bad association** inevitably follows. Unfulfilled desires lead to anger, anger to delusion, and delusion to memory loss. One who forgets his true identity is cast into lower births—this is the fate of such a soul.

One day, Chāṅgadeva sat to perform **arcanā**, the sacred worship of Śiva, using **pārthiva-linga** made of earth. He requested his disciple to bring the necessary clay. But the disciple, preoccupied with domestic matters, was reluctant. Fearful of displeasing the guru, he concocted a deceitful plan. He went to the confluence of rivers (**saṅgam**) and inverted a clay bowl into the sand, falsely presenting it as a **śivaliṅga** already present at the site.

"These liṅgas are already here," he said to the blind guru. "No need for fresh clay. We have seen it ourselves—come and perform your worship."

But Chāṅgadeva, gifted with spiritual vision, saw through the deception. He replied, "**All Earth is of the form of liṅga; what is fixed or moving is all Śiva.** Yet, show me where the so-called immovable liṅga lies."

The disciple, still determined in his deceit, led Chāṅgadeva to the inverted bowl and said with feigned reverence, "Here, Swāmī, is the liṅga we found." As Chāṅgadeva, full of **śraddhā**, chanted "**Oṁ Hara!**", a divine miracle occurred—**Lord Kailāśapati Śiva** himself descended into that very spot. The inverted bowl transformed into a **real, eternal liṅga** (akṣaya liṅga), now empowered by mantra and faith.

Witnessing this divine transformation, the disciple was shaken. Filled with remorse, he rushed back to the āśrama to prepare **naivedya** with great sincerity. When he brought the offering to Chāṅgadeva, the guru, still absorbed in worship, humbly offered his own heartfelt prayer: "I am a man of no mantra, no ritual, no knowledge. I lack devotion and have no strength to perform pūjā. But You, O Lord, are the lover of bhakti. Accept my humble offering."

Hearing these simple, sincere words, **Lord Śiva**, the consort of Pārvatī, was greatly pleased and declared: "You have worshipped Me most perfectly, with pure heart and true bhakti. I am satisfied."

With that, the miracle was complete. Chāṅgadeva held the disciple's hand and returned to the āśrama, where both of them partook in the offered food. And in that sacred moment, the disciple too realized the folly of his actions and the glory of **true devotion**, forever transformed by the mercy of the **sadguru** and the Lord.

When the disciples failed to retrieve even a palmful of sacred earth from the confluence for the worship, they hastily returned to Śrī Cāṅgadeva, anxious and disturbed. Upon arriving, they narrated the astonishing sight they had encountered—how the small offering bowl,

placed upside-down on the spot where Śrī Swāmī had previously worshipped, remained completely immovable, no matter how much force they applied.

They confessed, “We tried with all our strength, but it would not budge. The earth beneath has become hard like stone. We even attempted to dig it out, but could not find its end. Our minds are troubled.”

The disciples began to reflect with regret: “Perhaps in our pride and reliance on artificial intelligence and effort, we have forgotten the grace of the true Guru. If the Guru so wishes, even a small transgression can invoke a terrible curse, plunging an entire lineage into destruction.”

They likened their situation to one who carelessly awakens a sleeping serpent by stepping on its tail, or one who invites peril by drinking poison in the company of tigers. “Just as a fire quickly consumes even a healthy tree, our act too was rash,” they lamented. “He who turns an ordinary clump of sand into a divine, eternal liṅga with a glance—such a person should never be angered. Who knows what fierce consequences may arise?”

Trembling with fear, the two disciples came to Śrī Cāṅgadeva and fell flat at his feet in full daṇḍavat praṇāma. Standing before him with folded hands, they humbly confessed, “Master, we have committed a grave offence—please listen as we submit ourselves fully.”

They explained how, failing to locate sacred soil, they had mockingly offered a bowl filled with ordinary sand and turned it upside-down in front of the Lord, an act born from laziness and entanglement in worldly illusions, thereby neglecting the true path of spirituality.

“But behold! Śrī Swāmī accepted even that offering. By His touch, the mound of sand transformed into an immovable, eternal liṅga. Though we tried with all our strength, we could not move it even an inch. It has now become solid like stone. We tried to unearth it but could not reach its limit.”

As Śrī Cāṅgadeva listened to this account, he became deeply moved. His eyes welled up with tears, his body trembled with divine emotion. “Indeed,” he said, “I am truly fallen. How could such a divine manifestation take place merely by the touch of that bowl? Surely, it is the Lord Himself—Śrī Mahādeva—who has appeared in this form.”

He admitted, “I possess neither devotion, nor emotion, nor any command of mantras or mystical knowledge. Yet, the Lord of Gaurī Himself has appeared before me as the deity Vateśvara!”

In a fervent prayer, Cāṅgadeva exclaimed, “O Lord! From now on, grant me the opportunity to serve You alone. Of the countless liṅgas that exist on Earth, You have manifested here to glorify me—what mercy!”

Thus praying, Śrī Cāṅgadeva opened his eyes and beheld with divine vision the effulgent form of Lord Śiva. Awestruck, he commanded his disciples, "Go now, return to your homes. Hold no bitterness in your hearts. Let peace and bliss abide with you."

Reflecting on this incident, the narration continues: *Unlike ordinary ascetics, who often curse even for the smallest offence, saints and true Gurus are like oceans of peace. Even when their disciples behave with laziness or ignorance, they forgive out of compassion.*

Meeting a true Guru, even accidentally, is like meeting the Lord Himself. Such a Guru never displays ego or takes offence. He sees his disciple as worshipable and treats him with dignity. A true Guru is one who is the living embodiment of God, and when his grace descends, it brings about divine revelation.

Despite knowing the laziness of his disciples, Śrī Cāṅgadeva did not curse them. He always held forgiveness in his heart. He instructed them again: "Return to your homes. As for me, I shall remain here at the bank of the Tāpi, offering worship to Śrī Vateśvara Mahādeva."

With great humility, the disciples offered obeisances to their Guru and departed for their homes, feeling inner joy and a sense of divine relief. They had been afraid of having wronged their master, fearing his curse, but now realized that their misstep had, in fact, led to a greater fortune.

Reassured and content, they resumed their lives in peace, firmly convinced of the truth of the Lord's mercy, and no longer attached to worldly quarrels or debates.

Meanwhile, at that sacred spot, Lord Śiva Himself had manifested in the bowl. Śrī Cāṅgadeva's fame spread across the world. Pilgrims came from distant lands—merchants, weak-hearted seekers, scholars, brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas, and śūdras alike—all gathered to take darśana.

Everyone who came offered vows and prayers, and their wishes were fulfilled. Inspired donors built temples and maṭhas at that site. Where there is devotion, divine powers naturally manifest. Food distribution and peace abounded without limit. The glory of Vateśvara grew immensely.

In the chapters to follow, Cāṅgadeva will be shown mastering the fourteen vidyās and engaging in extraordinary spiritual practice. O devotees, listen attentively!

Indeed, this *Bhaktalīlāmṛta*, the nectar of devotional pastimes, is like a gentle forest of Tulasī—here, the Lord of Lakṣmī plays lovingly in His transcendental form. Where the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha has descended, surely His devotees will also arrive—just as ministers naturally accompany a king dwelling in the forest.

Therefore, this *Bhaktalīlāmṛta* is the beloved abode of devotees. Even kings cherish it and recite its verses with great joy.

Thus ends the second, nectar-filled chapter of *Śrī Bhaktalīlāmṛta*. By merely hearing it, one's deepest desires are fulfilled.

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Chapter 3

In the divine invocation of **Lord Ganesha**, the sacred tale begins. It is said that simply listening to the stories of true devotees equates to bathing in all holy pilgrimages, and is as spiritually elevating as performing rituals during auspicious cosmic periods. Such is the power of sacred listening—when done with devotion, it bestows the fruits of all righteous acts and spiritual disciplines like **yoga** and **tapasya**.

In earlier chapters, we learned of **Changadev's** disciples—cunning and impatient—who tried to deceive the saint by placing an empty bowl upside down on the sand. Yet, due to Changadev's pure devotion, **Lord Shiva himself manifested** in the form of **Vateshwar (Lord beneath the Banyan tree)** from that very bowl. From then on, the place became a revered pilgrimage, and Changadev's name became synonymous with divine revelation.

Changadev, deeply moved by this miraculous event, immersed himself completely in the **worship of Lord Vateshwar**. Day and night, whether sitting, sleeping, dreaming, or awake, his heart and mind remained fixed on the Lord. Ritualistically, he worshipped thrice a day, and pilgrims would flock from near and far to gain a glimpse of the sacred form and fulfill their wishes.

A resolve then took root in Changadev's heart—he desired to master the **fourteen sacred vidyas (branches of knowledge)** to witness their truths through personal experience. These vidyas ranged from **Vedic knowledge, logic, grammar, astrology, medicine, martial arts, music, and yogic powers**, all the way to **clairvoyance and the ability to enter another's body**.

Over time, he became a master of these profound sciences. His fame spread like wildfire, and people came seeking blessings for ailments, infertility, and other worldly troubles—all of which were mysteriously healed through **a single darshan of Lord Vateshwar**.

Despite his vast learning and mastery of the **64 divine arts (kala)**, Changadev realized that without **love and devotion (bhakti)**, all knowledge was fruitless. Even the rarest of mystical powers paled in comparison to the sweetness of divine love.

As time passed, **Changadev's fame soared**—princes, priests, merchants, and commoners came from 56 different regions to witness the glory of Vateshwar. **Musical instruments, flags, and singing processions** filled the sacred grounds. Devotees from all castes and walks of life gathered, chanting the Lord's name, overwhelmed by spiritual ecstasy.

For over a hundred years, the sacred site of Siddhai (the place of realization) prospered under Changadev's grace. But as the time of his departure neared, Changadev, knowing his end was near through divine insight, **entered deep yogic trance (samadhi)**. He drew his vital

breath up to the **tenth chakra**, leaving his body motionless like a wooden log—still and lifeless, yet serene.

For **nine days**, his disciples watched over the inert body, never losing hope. Then, suddenly, a **breath returned**, and Changadev **awoke from his yogic slumber**, as if one awakened from a deep sleep. The crowd stood in awe, marveling at this divine play, understanding that they had witnessed something truly extraordinary.

As time passed, Siddha Chāṅgadeva continued to remain in a transcendental state, just as before. His divine composure, unshaken and yogic in nature, stood firm, astonishing those who beheld him. Onlookers were filled with wonder, seeing how the saint lived in perfect detachment.

According to the declaration of the Vedas, a person may live for one hundred years in the Kali-yuga if there is a divine cause. Thus, Chāṅgadeva, in alignment with these scriptural truths, reached the age of one hundred, yet did not permit the validity of such divine words to be questioned.

When his hundredth year concluded, Chāṅgadeva moved to another sacred location, where great gatherings still occurred. Even there, pilgrims thronged in large numbers to receive his darśana. After a year had passed, he returned again to the bank of the Tāpi River and engaged in the complete, devotional worship of Lord Vaṭeśvara with singular devotion and elaborate rituals.

Though a hundred years had passed, Chāṅgadeva deceived time itself. Taking up his spiritual body once more, he began displaying wondrous feats. He surpassed even the span of one thousand and four hundred years! His fame spread far and wide, with no comparison elsewhere. In each of those fourteen centuries, he lived a full year in fourteen different places, always accompanied by his disciples and followers.

At the end of each yearly sojourn, he would return to the banks of the Tāpi River and offer extensive worship to Lord Vaṭeśvara. These places he visited were varied and scattered across the Earth, each marked by his sacred presence. For ninety-nine years, he continued to reside near Vaṭeśvara, where all siddhis—spiritual perfections—served him like humble servants. This glorious life was renowned across the entire world.

One day, a brāhmaṇa from Pratiṣṭhāna (modern-day Paithan) happened to be traveling along the road where the festival was underway. Out of curiosity, he inquired from the pilgrims about the grand procession he had encountered—where had it originated and where was it bound?

The devotees informed him that the exalted Siddha Chāṅgadeva had been residing at the confluence of the Tāpi River for over fourteen centuries and that his physical form was still intact. Merely seeing him fulfilled all the longings of the heart. Hearing this, the brāhmaṇa

was filled with joy and thought to himself, "What a blessed opportunity! I must take darśana of such a great yogī without delay."

Nurturing this pure intention, he journeyed to the abode of Vaṭeśvara. There, he saw a countless multitude gathered at the riverbank, and he was struck with awe at the sight. As soon as he arrived, he offered full prostrations before Chāṅgadeva. Gazing upon the saint's divine form, he saw none other than Lord Śiva Himself. Chāṅgadeva's body was adorned with sacred ash smeared from head to toe, with rudrākṣa beads gracing his neck. He wore a tiger-skin garment, appearing just like Lord Śiva of Mount Kailāsa.

As is said in the śāstras, the devotee takes on the very form of the deity he worships—through thought, meditation, dreams, and wakefulness. Thus, Lord Vaṭeśvara had taken permanent residence in Chāṅgadeva's heart, manifesting through his very form.

Seeing this astonishing sight, the brāhmaṇa's heart was filled with contentment. Once again, he bowed down with deep reverence and sat nearby in the saint's presence. Overwhelmed, he exclaimed, "How blessed is this day! I have received darśana of the Master. My sins and suffering have vanished! Today feels as if I have bathed in all the holy rivers simply by seeing the rising sun, and all my life's purposes have found fulfillment in beholding the feet of this great saint."

Hearing these praises, Chāṅgadeva smiled with satisfaction and spoke warmly to the brāhmaṇa, inquiring, "Where do you come from, noble one? In which sacred land do you reside? What path of life are you pursuing? Please tell me all in detail. What kind of ruler governs your land, and how does he treat his subjects? Have you seen or experienced anything extraordinary on Earth? Kindly share it with me."

To this, the brāhmaṇa humbly replied, "I come from the holy land of Pratiṣṭhāna, situated on the banks of the Gaṅgā, which is known as a sacred brahma-kṣetra. I live there with my family and sustain them by going for alms. I have no formal study or scholarship, but I live a simple, honest life."

Then the brāhmaṇa continued with amazement, "But this year, a miraculous event occurred—one the likes of which I have never heard before, nor do I believe it has happened in the past or shall ever happen in the future. A sannyāsī, one who had renounced all family life, was found to have begotten four sons, all still young. These children, with great clarity, recited the entire Ṛgveda through the mouth of a mere bullock!"

Hearing this astonishing account, the brāhmaṇa was compelled to bring it to the saint's attention. Chāṅgadeva was deeply moved, struck with wonder, and asked, "How could a renunciant, having given up wife and home, produce children? Tell me the full story."

The brāhmaṇa began narrating, "There is a sacred village named Apegaon on the banks of the Gaṅgā. There lived a virtuous and learned couple, the brāhmaṇa Govindapaṇḍita and his devout wife Nirubāī. They were pious, pure-hearted, and united in love. One day, the great

Siddha Gahininātha appeared and imparted spiritual knowledge to them. From this arose a blazing fire of renunciation in the heart of Govindapaṇḍita."

"Despite this renunciation, after nine months, Nirubāī gave birth to a radiant son. When they saw the child's face, the joy of both parents knew no bounds. On the twelfth day, the child was named Viṭhobā. As he grew, his virtues blossomed beautifully, bringing happiness to the entire household. At the age of eight, he was given the sacred thread and became proficient in Vedic knowledge."

"Eventually, with his parents' blessings, Viṭhobā set out on a pilgrimage. Filled with repentance and deep longing, he bathed in holy waters, constantly chanting the divine names—Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Nārāyaṇa, Acyuta, Ananta, Janārdana—on his tongue and within his heart, always in loving remembrance of the Lord."

After his initial devout intentions, Śrī Viṭṭhoba first journeyed to the sacred city of Dvārakā. There, upon the banks of the holy Gomati River, he performed ceremonial bathing with great reverence. Completing his bath, he then went to take darśana of Lord Śrī Viṣṇu. With heart full of devotion, he left Dvārakā to undertake a broader pilgrimage across the western tīrthas (holy sites), all renowned in the Purāṇas by name and glory.

After visiting these tīrthas in due order, he arrived swiftly at the revered Bhīmā-Śaṅkarī, and then proceeded towards the banks of the river Indrayāṇī, to the ancient town of Aḷaṅkāpuri. There, Lord Viṭṭhoba again performed his ritual bath and immediately began worshipping Lord Viṣṇu with full concentration.

At that time, the local Kulkarṇī (village priest and record-keeper), named Sidopant, happened to arrive at the river for his own bath. Seeing the bright aura and noble bearing of Viṭṭhoba, Sidopant invited him warmly to his home and, with heartfelt devotion, served him prasāda (sanctified food). He then made arrangements for Viṭṭhoba's rest in the beautiful garden of his home.

That night, as Sidopant slept, Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga Himself appeared in his dream. The divine form of the Lord began to speak directly to him, saying, "Your daughter is of marriageable age. Offer her in marriage immediately to this brāhmaṇa guest. Four divine incarnations will take birth from their union."

Awaking with divine inspiration and conviction, Sidopant at once summoned astrologers to ascertain the truth of this vision. When their readings aligned with the prophecy, both parties agreed. Thus, Sidopant performed the kanyādāna (ceremonial offering of his daughter in marriage) in accordance with full Vedic procedure. For four days, the marriage ceremonies were carried out with great joy and piety.

After the marriage, Sidopant, along with his entire family, set out for the holy town of Paṇḍharpur. There he brought his daughter and son-in-law for darśana of Lord Śrī Rukmiṇī-Viṭṭhala. After spending four joyous days, Sidopant prepared to return. However, the son-

in-law—Viṭṭhoba—expressed a heartfelt desire: “Before we part, I wish to visit Rāmeśvaram.”

Understanding his earnest wish, Sidopant gave permission and blessings. Then, taking his daughter with him, Viṭṭhoba departed swiftly and visited the sacred kṣetras (pilgrimage sites) of southern Bhāratavarṣa, ultimately returning to Aḷaṅkāpuri after fulfilling all his intentions.

Reuniting with Sidopant brought great joy to both hearts. Viṭṭhoba expressed a deep yearning to visit his own parents, saying, “Kindly grant me permission to return home and have their darśana.” Perceiving this inner pull, Sidopant agreed, and Viṭṭhoba set out with his wife for the banks of the Gaṅgā.

There, he met his father Govindapant and offered him fine clothes and ornaments. Sharing the entire story of his travels and marriage, he filled his father’s heart with joy. His mother Nirubāī was especially delighted upon seeing her daughter-in-law. After seeking the blessings of his parents, Viṭṭhoba and his wife returned to their own home.

As time passed, news came that both his parents had departed from this world. Upon hearing this, Sidopant returned to Aḷaṅkāpuri to console his son-in-law. Yet Viṭṭhoba, detached from worldly grief, had begun to feel the stirrings of renunciation.

One day, he approached his father-in-law and said with humility, “Please allow me to live with you. I am no longer attached to this worldly life.” With gentle persuasion and affectionate appeal, Sidopant welcomed him and brought him back to Aḷaṅkāpuri.

Viṭṭhoba assured him, “So long as I do not have progeny, I shall remain in this household life. Thereafter, I will decide according to what the mind guides.” Accepting this, Viṭṭhoba remained in the sacred kṣetra and observed the annual pilgrimages to Paṇḍharpur during Āṣāḍhī and Kārtikī Ekādaśīs. He performed Viṣṇu worship, kīrtana, and constant nāma-smaraṇa.

However, though time passed, no child was born to them. One day, Viṭṭhoba expressed to his wife, Rukmābāī, “I have become detached. Please give me permission to take sannyāsa.” But Rukmābāī, grieved and silent, relayed the matter to her father. Sidopant insisted, “Without begetting a son, you should not renounce.”

While Rukmābāī sat in deep sorrow, Viṭṭhoba approached her and said, “I am going to bathe in the Gaṅgā.” Without further delay, he set off for Vārāṇasī. There, after bathing with great humility, he sat and listened to Purāṇic discourses and a sublime commentary on the Bhagavad-gītā. Moved by the glorification of renunciation, he decided, “This worldly life is an endless sea of suffering. I shall now take sannyāsa.”

He approached Śrīpāda Āśramī, a renounced saint, and submitted himself. “Please grant me initiation and engage me in your service,” he humbly pleaded. When questioned about his

background, he responded, “I am all alone—no wife, no son, no worldly ties.” Believing this to be true, the saint granted him sannyāsa.

Meanwhile, devotees from his region who had come to Vārāṇasī recognized him and quickly reported this news to Sidopant, who became deeply disturbed. Rukmābāī too was grief-stricken. She began to serve the Aśvattha tree, engaging in austere vows. Pleased with her devotion, Goddess Lakṣmī appeared to her and gave a boon: “Soon you shall be blessed with a son.”

Shortly thereafter, Śrīpāda Sannyāsī visited Aḷaṅkāpuri and stayed near her home. Rukmābāī humbly offered him respects, and to her amazement, he simply said, “You shall soon be blessed with a child.”

Rukmābāī smiled upon hearing this. The saint inquired gently, “Why do you smile?” She replied, “My husband went to Vārāṇasī and took sannyāsa, and now you bless me with a child. How can both be true?”

Realizing the mistake, the saint exclaimed, “One who grants sannyāsa to a young woman’s husband while she is childless commits a grave offense!” He consulted oracles, and divine signs confirmed the truth.

He then asked Rukmābāī about her family. “They are all here,” she said, and brought her father. Sidopant respectfully welcomed the sannyāsī to his home, washed his feet, and offered a fine meal.

Śrīpāda revealed, “My monastery is in Kāśī. But due to divine will, I came to Rāmeśvaram and then to Aḷaṅkāpuri. There, your son-in-law told me a false tale and received sannyāsa. Now I must return swiftly. Bring your daughter with me so we may restore dharma.”

Sidopant agreed and went with Rukmābāī to the sannyāsī’s forest āśrama. Viṭṭhoba had been given the sannyāsa name “Chaitanya.” The guru called Chaitanya aside and said gently, “Tell me the truth about your family.”

Trembling and fearful, Chaitanya placed his head at the guru’s feet and confessed, “I left my wife behind.”

The guru called Rukmābāī and said, “Accept him back. Fear not the consequences of this reversal of vows. Obeying the guru’s command is higher than ritual injunctions. Lord Hṛṣīkeśa will support you.”

With the guru’s blessings, Chaitanya embraced his wife once again and returned to Aḷaṅkāpuri, accepting household life. Though many criticized and ostracized him, he remained steady like a deep ocean, unaffected by waves of public opinion. The illusions of lust and anger were forever vanquished from his heart, and he became a paragon of virtue and renunciation in household life.

Once, having begged for alms from the town, the sage collected just enough food to satisfy his hunger. Then, tying up his robes, he retired into the forest, living there in solitude with his devoted wife.

Twelve years passed this way — a life of austerity and penance — and in time, they were blessed with three sons, each a spiritual gem, and a daughter of such virtue and grace that none could equal her in all creation.

The eldest was named **Nivrutti**, the very incarnation of Rudra, the Lord of dissolution. The second, **Jnanadev**, born as an avatar of Vishnu, emerged into this world to spread divine wisdom. The third son was **Sopan**, a manifestation of Brahma himself, while the daughter, **Muktabai**, was none other than Adi-Maya, the original divine energy.

The birth of these divine children brought immense joy to their mother, Rukmini (Rukmabai).

Then the sage turned to his wife and said, "Our children are now of age, fit for the sacred rites. Let us invite the noble Brahmins and consult them on how to initiate them into the spiritual vows."

They gathered a grand assembly of Brahmins, offering salutations with deep respect. And said, "You, who know the scriptures—please advise us. What is the righteous path for us now?"

The Brahmins, hearing this humble plea, opened the scriptures and delivered their judgment: "You, having taken sannyasa (renunciation), should not have accepted a wife. Thus, these children are considered ritually impure. Redemption must be sought not for the body, but for the soul. There is no other way forward."

Hearing this pronouncement, the sage was overcome with remorse. Leaving behind wife and children, he again retreated to the forest, fully immersed in divine bliss.

Seeing his repentance, the Brahmins said, "This very repentance is the penance. Through the grace of the Guru, purity is restored even in the most unlikely of circumstances."

Then Nivrutti turned to the Brahmins and spoke: "Our parents are gone. We four siblings are left alone in the world. Please tell us—what shall become of us?"

The Brahmins advised them, "Go at once to **Paithan**. The learned Brahmins there will judge your case with scripture and justice. We shall accept their verdict."

With that, they handed the children a letter to be delivered in Paithan, Describing them as the offspring of a renunciate and asking for a just resolution and penance, if any.

The four siblings — Nivrutti, Jnanadev, Sopan, and Muktabai — came with pure hearts to the banks of the Godavari. Bathing with tears of repentance, they prayed: "O Mother Ganga! We are orphaned, helpless, fallen. Please uplift us in your grace!"

After bathing, they entered the holy city and paid respects to the Brahmins there, Humbly presenting the letter and narrating their story.

The Brahmins examined the scriptures and declared: "There is no ritual penance for children born of a sannyasi. But there is a divine path — go, surrender yourselves fully to Lord Hari, Sing His praises with a heart full of repentance."

"See all beings as divine — even the lowest castes, even animals. Offer them love and respect, for the Lord resides in all. Sing the names and glories of Shri Hari, and you will attain liberation."

Hearing these words, Nivrutti, Jnanadev, Sopan, and Muktabai rejoiced. They bowed to the Brahmins, accepting their wisdom with reverence.

The Brahmins then asked Jnanadev, "You are called 'Jnanadev' — the Lord of Wisdom. How did this name come to be? Have you studied the Vedas or the Puranas?"

To this, Jnanadev humbly replied, "No study gave me this name. One day, a bull was bathed in knowledge — and thus, the name was revealed." And he added, "My soul is full. There is no difference between me and the bull."

Surprised, the Brahmins said, "If there is truly no difference between you and the bull, then have the Vedas spoken through its mouth!"

With devotion, Jnanadev placed his hand on the bull's head and said, "O friend, speak the Vedas!"

At once, the bull began to chant — the **Vedas flowed from its mouth**, From the opening mantras to the sacred hymns, spoken clearly in human tongue!

The Brahmins were stunned — such a miracle had never been seen on earth. Though they themselves had memorized the Vedas, they had never witnessed such divine power in any body.

They realized then: these children were **avatars**, incarnations of the Lord Himself, Sent to uplift the world in a time of spiritual decay.

With hearts full of awe and remorse, the Brahmins bowed low to the children. Jnanadev lifted them with compassion, embracing them lovingly.

The Brahmins then recounted this tale to **Changdev**, a yogi of immense power and age, And said, "O Changdev, this is no ordinary child. He made a bull recite the Vedas! Can you comprehend such a deed?"

Changdev, though a master of 64 arts and knower of all scriptures, was humbled upon hearing of Jnanadev's miracle. He had lived for over 1,400 years, yet never seen such divine power.

He said, "Even the gods have boasted of their greatness and were humbled. I too have acquired great yogic power — but never such divine grace as this!"

He recalled: "Narada once claimed to be the sweetest singer, But Krishna made even a bear sing sweeter than him. Or when Brahma declared himself the Creator, Yet Vishwamitra produced an entire cosmos through his will!"

Now, deeply moved, Changdev realized: **True greatness lies not in power, but in surrender to the divine.**

Thus ends this section of the sacred **Bhaktalilamrut**, Chapter Three — A nectar of devotion, a story sweet as divine love itself.

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Chapter 4

"Śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ"—Obeisances unto Lord Gaṇeśa, remover of all obstacles.

How can one hope to weigh the glories of the Lord's devotees? Even if the vast Earth were transformed into a weighing scale, still the weight of their virtues would defy measure. Their divine lives and sacred deeds are so profound that no human tongue can do justice by mere words.

Even if the mighty ocean were commanded to speak, its roaring waves to utter tales, still it would falter in expressing the fame of bhaktas. The divine effulgence of the devotees of Bhagavān is such that even the most eloquent poet is rendered speechless in their praise.

The mind, ever restless and unsteady, can perhaps be restrained, like a bird confined to a cage. But when the attempt is made to describe the unearthly position of a true Vaiṣṇava, the very speech of the poet falters, his thoughts dissolve into silence.

One may imagine a vine stretching skyward, seeking the heavens as its support, or even the setting sun being arrested in his descent—but to fully gather and preserve the deeds of the Lord's pure devotees in any scripture? That is a task beyond even the gods.

The blades of grass that sprout upon the earth may be counted by some divine agency, but the countless pastimes of the saints? No enumeration is possible. Their lives are infinite in virtue, unbounded in meaning.

Thus, the poet confesses his own incapacity. "In approaching the retelling of such glorious lives," he says, "I am like a child prattling nonsense before its loving mother. Yet even such babble brings joy to her heart, for it is spoken with love." In the same way, though the poet knows he is unqualified, he hopes that the saints, full of mercy, will forgive his foolish attempt.

A servant who silently does his master's bidding is far more beloved than a clever man who merely debates philosophy. In that spirit, the poet submits his efforts, trusting that sincerity will find favor, even if eloquence falls short.

Knowing his own ignorance, he admits, "It was only by the mercy of the Lord of Rukmiṇī—Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself—that I have been given access to the hidden treasure: the biographies of the saints. It is He who resides in my heart, and He alone who composes these words. I am merely the instrument."

The Glories of Śrī Jnāneśvar and Cāṅgadeva's Transformation

In the earlier chapter, the tale had been recounted of a brāhmaṇa from Pratiṣṭhāna—an ancient and sacred town—who had resolved to reveal the life of Śrī Jnāneśvar Mahārāj to the world. To this end, he sought the help of the great yogī Cāṅgadeva, renowned far and wide.

This was no ordinary yogī. Cāṅgadeva had performed astonishing feats: he had made the Vedas manifest in the mouth of a buffalo and had brought the very ancestors—the pitṛs—down to Earth in visible form. When such miracles reached the ears of the devas, they were struck with awe.

The celestial beings of the heavens were astonished. Yet, some among them harbored doubt. Was this possible? Could such miracles truly occur?

To answer this, they entered into deep yogic meditation. With steady breath and one-pointed mind, they plunged into the subtle realms of consciousness and examined the happenings upon Earth.

What did they perceive?

They saw the avatars of the Trimūrti—the essence of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Maheśa—manifest in a singular, radiant presence. The saints, they realized, were the incarnations of divinity itself. Their pastimes were no exaggerations—they were true, and fully divine.

They beheld with spiritual eyes how, at Pratiṣṭhāna, the young saint Jnāneśvar had made the Vedas speak from the mouth of a buffalo, and how he had brought forth the ancestors to validate the purity of his family line. These were not mere legends, but actual spiritual accomplishments.

Having seen this, the gods returned from their trance. Their hearts were filled with reverence.

Meanwhile, Cāṅgadeva, though a mighty yogī who had lived over a thousand years, was now humbled. He had traveled far, with many disciples and fame in all directions. Yet now he came to realize the greatness of Śrī Jnāneśvar Mahārāj and offered his respectful words in all humility.

He spoke: "O Saint, listen attentively with love. In a previous lifetime, I had committed an offense that earned the curse of Lord Indra himself. Due to that transgression, I was cursed to remain in the earthly realm."

"Yet later, when I performed severe penance, Indra was pleased. He came and declared, 'Three divine incarnations shall appear upon Earth. If you surrender unto them with sincerity, you shall be immediately liberated and regain your place in the heavenly realms.'"

“He instructed me thus, and I took birth upon Earth. Engaging in yoga and spiritual practices, I attained siddhis and prolonged my life. For 1400 years, I preserved my body, awaiting the divine appearance of these saints.”

“Now, Jnāneśvar has appeared. I must go swiftly and receive his darśana.”

When Cāṅgadeva’s disciples heard this, they were disturbed. They thought: “If our guru meets Jnāneśvar, he will be instantly liberated. But then—who will lead us? Who will maintain this tradition? Who will care for us?”

Much like Śuka, who once hesitated to accept mokṣa because he feared abandoning his responsibilities, these disciples, too, were worried. So, though they revered Jnāneśvar, they began plotting a way to delay Cāṅgadeva’s meeting with him.

They spoke carefully and said, “O master, sometimes the fame of another can diminish one's own position. If others perceive your submission to this young saint, they may think your greatness lesser. Let us act wisely.”

They suggested: “Great yogīs have various approaches. Let us first send a letter to this saint. If he is truly wise, he will reply. Then, based on his response, you may choose to meet him.”

Hearing this, Cāṅgadeva agreed. He took up his pen, sat thoughtfully, and began composing a letter.

Yet even as he prepared to write, he reflected: “Though Jnāneśvar is evidently a master of supreme knowledge, he is still young in age. How should I address him—with respect, or with paternal affection? This is a delicate matter…”

Thus began the sacred correspondence that would lead to the legendary encounter between the ancient yogī and the divine boy-saint.

Though Śrī Jnāneśvar was young in age, his works were no less than miraculous. The poet remarks, “Should one dismiss fire for its small flame? When fed with fuel, it consumes forests.” Similarly, greatness should not be measured by age—Śrī Jnāneśvar, though a mere youth, had performed deeds that even the ancients could not conceive.

Was not the mighty Earth coiled within the grip of the serpent Vāsuki during the cosmic churning? Yet can Vāsuki be called small because of that feat? Ordinary cows may resemble Kāmadhenu in form, but only one bears divine potency. A small vessel may hold the Ganges at its source, but from it flows a stream that becomes the ocean. Even the great Garuḍa, who appears but another bird, carries Lord Viṣṇu Himself upon his back.

Rāma, the young son of Daśaratha, slew the mighty Rāvaṇa. Kṛṣṇa, a mere child in mother Yaśodā’s lap, lifted Govardhana Hill with his tender fingers. The Supreme Brahman, though subtler than the subtlest atom, pervades the universe through every pore.

Likewise, though Śrī Jnāneśvar appeared as a mere adolescent, he had revealed impossibilities as if they were common play.

With these thoughts spinning in his mind, Cāṅgadeva found himself confused. How should he address such a saint in a letter? Overcome with hesitation, he sent a blank paper through two of his trusted disciples.

He instructed them, "Go to Āḷandī. Observe carefully the condition of the four siblings—Nivṛtti, Jnāneśvar, Sopān, and Muktabāī. Understand how they live, how they perform their daily practices. What is the nature of their devotion? What mantras do they chant? How do they bathe, meditate, and worship?"

"Discover what scriptures they study, which Purāṇas they hear, what disciplines they follow. Do they practice kindness toward all beings? Do they live amidst māyā without being affected? How do they restrain their senses? What penance do they undertake?"

"Observe the behavior they display among people. How do they maintain their needs? What path of yoga do they practice? What knowledge and arts do they possess? What miracles or siddhis have they shown? Try to understand everything."

After giving these instructions, Cāṅgadeva handed them the blank letter and said, "Now go swiftly to Alankāpura (Alandi) and bring back their reply."

He added reverently, "Offer my obeisance to the three incarnations—Nivṛtti, Jnāneśvar, and Sopān. And with them, the complete being—Muktabāī. Speak to them with all respect and humility."

Thus, sending them off with folded palms and a heart full of reverence, the great Yogī Cāṅgadeva bowed his head and bade the disciples farewell. The two brāhmaṇas departed quickly, holding his name in their hearts, chanting his glories with devotion. With every breath and every step, they remembered their master.

Whether sitting, walking, eating, sleeping, or dreaming, they were filled with only one prayer: "May we meet Jnāneśvar soon, and may our journey be fruitful."

As one ghaṭikā (24 minutes) passed on their path, something mysterious happened. Cāṅgadeva, with his mystic power, performed a siddhi—and suddenly the disciples found themselves transported all the way to Alandi!

Surprised by this sudden arrival, they asked the local residents, "Dear friends, what is the name of this sacred place? And what is the river that flows ahead?"

The villagers replied, "This is Alankāpura—now known as Āḷandī. The river you see is the sacred Indrayāṇī. Its glory is immense."

Amazed, the brāhmaṇas further inquired, “How far from here does the great Tapasvī Cāṅgadeva reside?”

The villagers answered, “He lives at a distance of thirty-two yojanas. We ourselves had once traveled there to take his darśana.”

This baffled the disciples. “We have traversed more than a hundred and fifty kos in but a moment,” they thought. “Surely this is a miracle of our master! We have witnessed his siddhi with our own eyes!”

Thus astonished, they took a holy bath in the Indrayāṇī River. After completing their purificatory rites, they entered the village, hearts eager for darśana. "When will we see Jnāneśvar?" they wondered.

As they walked through the village, they met a brāhmaṇa with a divine aura—clearly a Vaiṣṇava. They asked him politely, “Where might we find the residence of Jnāneśvar Mahārāj?”

Receiving directions, they hastened toward the maṭha. As they arrived, a great wonder unfolded before their eyes.

Even before they entered, Śrī Jnāneśvar, who is omniscient, turned to Nivṛttināth and said gently, “Please listen with attention. Soon we will have the darśana of one for whom we descended into this world. The exalted yogī Cāṅgadeva, who resides in Vāṭeśvara, has sent two brāhmaṇas and a letter.”

“But the letter is blank,” he added with a smile, “and yet it speaks volumes.”

Just then, the two disciples arrived at the door and offered their full daṇḍavat-praṇāms. Seeing their humility, Jnāneśvar said with grace, “So, you have come from Tapti to Āḷandī on behalf of Cāṅgadeva. He sent us this blank letter—is there a reason?”

Hearing these words, the two brāhmaṇas were astounded. “You are truly Parabrahman incarnate,” they exclaimed. “You knew our mission even before we spoke a word. You are indeed the incarnation of the three Lords, come to redeem the world!”

In loving humility, they placed the blank letter before him.

Jnāneśvar took it, and with serene calm, examined the empty pages from all sides. Then he turned to his elder brother and said, “This paper bears not a single letter. Why then was it sent? What message lies hidden in its emptiness?”

Nivṛttināth, in response, offered the true meaning behind the silence.

He said, “Cāṅgadeva is the incarnation of Marut-gaṇa, the powerful Vāṭeśvara. After descending to Earth, he studied the fourteen branches of knowledge and became expert in the sixty-four arts. He mastered aṣṭāṅga-yoga and brought all eight siddhis under his control.”

“So potent is his yogic power,” he continued, “that at the call of time, he could transport his soul to the farthest reaches of the cosmos. For 1400 years he preserved his body through penance, waiting to meet us.”

“He is indeed a great siddha, beyond the comprehension of even Brahmā. He knows the hearts of all living beings and carries the wisdom of the heavens.”

“But,” Nivṛttināth concluded, “for all his power, he still lacks the essence of Brahma-jnāna. Even in his dreams, he has not glimpsed that light. Thus, though great in siddhi, he is yet blinded in spirit.”

In a world where appearances often mask the void within, the poet draws a poignant deity—a widow, bereft of her beloved, adorns herself with ornaments of gold and jewels. Yet, if her neck is bare, lacking the necklace that once marked her joy and unity, her entire appearance seems empty, distasteful. Similarly, a person may be resplendent with worldly learning, achievements, and powers, yet without true inner wisdom—without the realization of the Self—such grandeur rings hollow. This was the case with the great yogī Chāṅgadeva.

Even the sky, though scattered with innumerable stars, remains dim and unadorned without the moon’s rise. The stars alone cannot lend splendor to the night; it is the moon that brings beauty, grace, and fullness. Such was the brilliance of Chāṅgadeva’s knowledge—bright like the stars, yet void of the inner moonlight of self-realization.

He had gathered armies of ascetics and yogic followers, possessed elephants and horses as a king of the spiritual domain, and was surrounded by admirers. But what is the worth of such a parade if the king—the Self, the ātman—is absent? The core was missing. The sovereign was yet unknown.

His eyes were sharp and lotus-like, gazing far and wide, seeing many things. But they had not seen the Supreme—the Paramātman within. What is the use of such eyes, if they do not behold the Divine? Blind, truly, is that vision which fails to pierce the veil of māyā. Thus was Chāṅgadeva’s knowledge—outwardly dazzling, inwardly obscured.

His body, youthful and majestic, bore all the thirty-two auspicious signs of perfection. Yet what value is a body, no matter how fair or marked with fortune, if it lacks the vital breath—prāṇa, the essence of life? Such was the yogī’s state: alive in form, yet unaware of the eternal.

For all his yogic prowess, his command over the elements and siddhis, Chāṅgadeva remained untouched by the flame of self-realization. His life, though extraordinary in its displays, was

inwardly unfulfilled. Knowledge, without humility, becomes the seat of ego. It clings tightly like a serpent, defiling what it touches.

Just as a pot of pure milk is rendered useless by a single grain of salt, so too is knowledge spoiled by pride. Or like a grand feast, suddenly revolting when a fly is seen floating upon it, ego transforms the sweetest truths into poison. This was the state of even a mighty yogī like Chāṅgadeva.

He had scaled the peaks of mystic power, yet upon hearing of the fame and spiritual stature of the young saint Jnāneśvara, his heart trembled. Who is this boy-saint, he wondered, who has captured the devotion of so many? With doubt and curiosity, he resolved to communicate, to write a letter to this child sage.

Pen in hand, Chāṅgadeva sat down to compose his words. But within his heart surged a tempest of doubt and confusion: "Am I the greater, or is he?" The very thought left him bewildered. Unable to write a single word, he left the letter blank. It was a message of silence—a mirror of his inner perplexity.

Though he had mastered all siddhis, the essence of Brahman had eluded him. Thus the blank letter became a symbol of unspoken questioning—an expression more profound than any words could convey.

"O ocean of wisdom," the poet now calls out, addressing Jnāneśvara, "You are the very embodiment of Vedānta. Please respond to Chāṅgadeva, not with dismissal, but with compassion. Let your words pierce his darkness."

When the gentle, all-knowing Jnāneśvara received the blank scroll, he bowed in humility. Understanding the yogī's inner turmoil, he took up his pen with compassion and wrote—sixty-five verses flowing with nectar, dense with spiritual meaning, luminous with the light of truth.

Those verses became a lamp in the cave of ignorance, rich in siddhānta, soaked in jnāna. "O dear listeners," the poet concludes, "listen now, as I narrate these sacred verses to you—to the best of my ability, with love and devotion."

When Nivṛtti-nātha, the eldest of the siblings and the deeply realized yogī, turned to his younger brother, he gently said, "Jnāneśvarā, a great saint has arrived—he stands at our threshold. Let us go forth and greet him."

At these simple yet profound words, Śrī Jnāneśvar smiled, already understanding the divine purpose behind the moment. But how should one greet a yogī like Chāṅgadeva, who had practiced austerities for fourteen hundred years, who rode upon a tiger, who wielded serpents as whips, and who commanded mystical powers beyond imagination? To answer pride with pride would be futile. To show humility was not enough. Instead, Jnāneśvar desired to respond with transcendental play—one that would teach the yogī a higher truth.

Thus, turning to the brick wall of their humble dwelling, Jnāneśvar spoke softly yet firmly, “Come, walk with us.” And lo! That which is insentient, the solid wall of clay and stone, stirred as if infused with life. To the astonishment of all, it moved.

Upon this moving wall, Jnāneśvar ascended with his elder brother Nivṛtti, his younger brother Sopan, and his sister Muktabāī. The four siblings, radiant as deities, sat as if upon a chariot of consciousness, moving gracefully through the streets of Ālandi. The villagers stood in wonder. They peered into the wall—there was no machinery, no magic. It was only stone and earth. Yet it walked!

From the other side approached Chāṅgadeva, the venerable yogī, riding majestically upon a tiger. His aura was fierce, his command total. Fourteen hundred disciples followed him in perfect formation. The sight was formidable—yet in the presence of the wall, even the tiger slowed, sensing something greater than power.

Like the fated meeting of Garuḍa and Hanumān, or the sudden embrace of Moon and Rohiṇī in the sky, this was a divine convergence. The earth seemed to pause. Even the spiritual energies—bhakti, jnāna, and vairāgya—seemed to gather as silent witnesses. The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Parabrahma Himself, was present in this leelā, animating the inanimate.

Chāṅgadeva saw and marveled. He, who had mastered time and defied death, had never seen such a miracle. A wall—lifeless, motionless by nature—walked at the word of a saint! His pride, nurtured over centuries of siddhi and austerity, melted like wax before the flame.

He descended from his tiger, his heart subdued, his ego dissolved. With deep reverence, he prostrated before the young saint. His disciples, witnessing their master’s transformation, abandoned their mystical displays. Serpents slithered away. The tiger turned toward the forest. The yogic pride they carried so long disappeared like clouds at sunrise.

Chāṅgadeva bowed low. “O Master,” he said with trembling voice, “we subdue wild beasts and serpents by our yogic strength. But you… you have made lifeless matter walk. This is beyond all siddhi. What power is this?”

Śrī Jnāneśvar, ever humble and serene, offered no boast. He bowed and placed his head on the ground before Chāṅgadeva, and then recited a simple abhaṅga, whose meaning opened like a lotus:

“When the Lord can float a stone boat across the ocean to Lanka, when monkeys can march over it with ease, what can be impossible for Him? Just as ants may walk upon rays of the sun, just as fire brings forth crops, so too, by the will of Śrī Hari, a wall may walk.”

He continued, “All things animate and inanimate, seen and unseen, are manifestations of the Lord’s own nature. Even the five great elements—who are ordinarily hostile to one another—live in harmony under His rule. Fire threatens water, water destroys earth, wind disperses

fire, but when Śrīdhara commands, they move like friends. By His will alone, this wall moved—not by my strength."

Hearing these words, Chāṅgadeva felt tears fill his eyes. The man who had lived longer than dynasties, whose siddhis made emperors tremble, now felt like a child before the greatness of Jnāneśvar. He fell again at his feet.

And there, under the sacred tree, all gathered. Nivṛtti, Sopan, Muktabāī, and Jnāneśvar sat in divine contentment. The name of Viṭṭhala rang through the air in joyous kīrtana. Even the gods above descended in their celestial vimānas, showering flowers and declaring, "Whoever receives darśana of Śrī Jnāneśvar will be delivered!"

Indra and the hosts of heaven returned to their abodes. On earth, saints and sages rejoiced. Chāṅgadeva, the once-proud yogī, now sat peacefully with the saints, transformed by love.

Though the four siblings were perfect in self-realization—having reached the highest yogic state of identity with Brahman—yet they chose not to abandon form. They remained in saguna-bhakti, worshiping the form of Viṭṭhala with affection and joy. They sang, they danced, they chanted the holy name.

One sat in meditation, merging the microcosm and the macrocosm. One lost awareness of the body, merged in the Absolute. Yet even as they realized the formless truth, they cherished the personal form of the Lord. They were not dry jnānīs; they were rasikas of the Lord's name and form.

Chāṅgadeva asked again, with awe in his heart, "O saints, how did you make the lifeless walk?"

And Jnāneśvar replied, "The Lord who pervades everything can make the impossible possible. Did not monkeys cross the ocean? Do ants not tread on sunlight? Is not the fire that burns also the bringer of nourishment? All this is possible by the will of the Supreme. It is not I who made the wall walk—it is He, the Lord of Lakṣmī, who did so."

Hearing these words from Jnāneśvar's lotus mouth, Chāṅgadeva fell again at his feet, Chāṅgadeva's transformation was complete. The one who had mastered the siddhis had now been conquered—not by power, but by bhakti.

In the next chapter, the sweet dialogue continues—O devotees, please listen with reverence!

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Chapter 5

Salutations to Śrī Gaṇeśa.

O Lord Śrī Hari! Your divine līlā is unfathomable, filled with wondrous and astonishing pastimes. You reveal Your character in countless forms—manifesting miraculously, again and again, to protect Your devotees. With Your hand placed upon their heads, You grant them fearlessness and deliver them from the boundless ocean of material existence.

You respond not to lineage or status, but only to pure, loving devotion. For You, O Lord, are ever near those who approach You with sincere love. Caste, creed, and background mean nothing to You. You are moved by compassion, O friend of the destitute and refuge of the humble.

You embraced Nāmadeva, though he was born in the house of a tailor. Seeing the sincerity of his devotion, You, O Lord of Gomati, drew him into Your bosom and joyfully accepted a meal served on a simple leaf plate in his humble home.

And what of Chokhāmēlā, born into the untouchable Mahar caste? Despite the derision he suffered, You, Viṭhobā, laid aside Your golden robes, tied up Your garment, and helped him herd cattle, working beside him like a servant.

You defended Dāmājī, a guileless brāhmaṇa, when he was accused of distributing the king's grain during a time of famine. To protect his honour, You Yourself bore the blame, revealing Your divine character once again.

You drank poison intended for Mīrābāī, the royal saint, when her own husband sought to end her life. And by Your divine touch, the poison became nectar, and her body glowed with health.

When the wicked king tormented Kānhopātrā, You, O Lord, rushed to her side. You snatched her consciousness away and merged it into Your own divine self. Yet, the husk of her physical form, like the bark of a tree, remains even today as a shrine visited by pilgrims.

Kabīr, the humble and sincere Vaiṣṇava, engaged in the remembrance of Śrī Rāma. In Your love for him, You joined him in weaving cloth with Your own divine hands.

For the four siblings—Jnāndev, Nivṛttināth, Sopān, and Muktābāī—You worked wonders to glorify them. Even the walls danced to declare their fame, as You elevated their names across the land.

O Lord of the devotees! You are the companion of the helpless and the protector of the fallen. In this very moment, I beg You—grant me Your protection and let me narrate Your glories sweetly, in full.

Previously, it was told how the young sage Jnāndev met the aged yogī Changadeva. Now, beneath the sacred banyan tree, the saints—Nivṛtti, Jnāndev, Sopān, and Muktābāī—gathered once more. They had sat peacefully, speaking profound words beneath its sheltering branches. The purpose of their assembly was clear: to instruct Changadeva and grant him realization of the Self.

Though Changadeva had lived for over fourteen hundred years, his heart remained untouched by true spiritual understanding. They saw in him a blank scroll, ready to receive divine wisdom. Now was the time to write upon it—not with mere words, but with the ink of direct experience.

Their conversation was not ordinary—it was the spontaneous flow of truth realized through sādhana. The very abhaṅgas they uttered became sacred scriptures, cherished by saints. When saints speak, there is no need for scholarly commentary. When God is present in person, why cling to a lifeless deity? Why gaze at the moon's reflection when you can behold the moon itself? Why store water in a cup when the Gaṅgā flows nearby?

These abhaṅgas, spoken in purity, were preserved word for word. They were filled with the nectar of Self-realization.

When Changadeva came before the saints, he was tested gently. The saints recognized his spiritual efforts and praised his yogic achievements. Nivṛtti and Jnāndev said, "O revered sage, You are wise, noble, and full of compassion. You have pierced the six cakras and attained mastery over the inner realms. Siddhis and ṛddhis bow at Your feet."

Hearing this, Changadeva felt humbled. He offered full prostrations, stretching his arms forward, placing his forehead to the earth. He joined his hands and spoke with reverence, "Today is the most blessed day of my life. The sight of saints has purified my heart and freed me from pride."

He continued, "By the Lord's grace, my body has been preserved even through the tricks of Time. I have longed to behold true yogīs like you. Please, now free me from the entanglements of worldly life."

Muktābāī, the embodiment of the Divine Mother, smiled and began to speak, for now was the moment to reveal the deepest secrets.

She began gently, "Just as only pure gold can become a vessel for nectar, so too must the heart be purified through renunciation. Then can the nectar of jnāna be stored within. The rain of grace falls naturally on fertile land, but for the seeds to bear fruit, they must be sown by the hands of one who knows.

When the heart is free of criticism and filled with love, it becomes a friend worthy of hearing sacred truths. Even a father reveals secrets to his worthy son, though he be young. So now, Changadeva, listen carefully as I reveal this mystery."

And then she spoke the truth in a few potent abhaṅgas: “The moment realization dawns, all claims of ‘I am this’ or ‘I am that’ vanish. When the ego dissolves, how can there be ‘me’ or ‘you’? The sense of ‘I’ is illusion; the truth is So’haṁ. Understand this clearly.”

Then Muktābāī asked, “Who are you really? Leave behind the illusion of individuality and become established in the essence of your true Self. Knowledge, renunciation—even the three guṇas—are only attributes of material nature. The Self is beyond all this, blemishless and pure.

Now, my friend, I shall describe the complete process of self-realization to you.

Whatever you see with your eyes, perceive it as the Self. When this understanding awakens within, the vision of duality will disappear. When the mind is filled with the remembrance of So’haṁ, the ego departs—and with it, the idea of ‘you’ and ‘I’ dissolves. What remains is unity alone.”

Hearing this nectar-like instruction, Changadeva again bowed down with great humility. With tears in his eyes, he confessed: “For fourteen hundred years I sat guarding buried treasure, unaware of its value. I tried to show off my yogic powers, riding tigers and using serpents as whips, earning praise and worship. My mind had become intoxicated by demonic pride, thinking myself superior. I made the siddhis my servants and thought myself divine.

But today, by your darśana, all that pride has melted. You four are like Śiva Himself to me. Please now dissolve this false self I have carried for so long!”

Changdev, once a powerful yogi filled with pride in his spiritual accomplishments, had begun to feel the burden of his ego. Recognizing his ignorance and arrogance, he humbly surrendered his pride.

Seeing this transformation, Sant Dnyaneshwar, moved by compassion, began to speak: “O Chāṅgadeva, now that you seek the shelter of truth, may your heart find rest in the Lord who resides within all. Cast aside your pride and the illusion of control. Real victory lies in surrender to the Supreme. What use is there in wandering the path of austerity when the heart still thirsts for recognition? True wisdom awakens when the soul turns away from selfish gain and yearns to serve the Lord of all hearts.”

Chāṅgadeva, stunned by this loving yet piercing counsel, listened in silence as Jñāneśvar spoke further: “You have achieved much, yet the root of all your struggle lies in forgetfulness of your eternal relationship with the Lord. All powers and knowledge are ornaments; devotion alone is the soul’s true wealth.”

Jñāneśvar’s words rang like temple bells in Chāṅgadeva’s ears. He who had mastered wind and fire, who had controlled his breath and bent nature to his will, now bowed his head and said: “Tell me, how may I serve the Supreme? How may I purify my heart?”

Jnāneśvar smiled: “Let your heart become a temple. Let your breath sing the Lord’s names. Let your eyes see Him in all beings, and let your hands serve His devotees. This is the path that brings joy not only to the soul, but to the Lord Himself.”

As the sun reached its peak, Jnāneśvar said with sweet simplicity: “You have come to our home; now be our guest.”

He turned to his sister, Muktabāī: “Prepare a meal. Chāṅgadeva must be honoured with love.”

Muktabāī went to the kitchen to begin her service. Uncluttered by pride or concern for bodily identity, she walked freely, inwardly absorbed in remembrance of the Lord. Chāṅgadeva, seeing her thus, lowered his gaze in modesty. He still perceived distinctions—male and female, pure and impure.

Muktabāī, noticing his discomfort, addressed him directly: “O revered one, you have come seeking the truth, yet you are bound by the illusion of outer forms? The soul within this body belongs to the Lord and knows no such difference. If your eyes still see duality, how will you behold the one truth that shines in all?”

She spoke not to shame, but to awaken. Chāṅgadeva, hearing this, was overcome with awe. In this young girl, he saw wisdom that no scripture could contain. He folded his palms and bowed before her.

“You have opened my eyes, O noble one. Let me follow your example.”

The cooking began. Chāṅgadeva, still possessing great yogic powers, attempted to prepare a meal by invoking heat through his mystic energy. He placed an earthen pot upon his head and activated the fire within, causing the grains to crackle and burst miraculously. It was a display of immense control over subtle energies.

But Jnāneśvar, observing this, gently turned to Nivṛttināth and said: “He still has some attachment to show. But his heart is softening.”

Nivṛtti replied: “Let us honour him fully and show that love and service to the Lord surpass all power.”

Then Sopan opened his mouth and invoked a sacred fire from within—not for display, but in service. Muktabāī placed her pot upon that divine fire, and soon the ashram was filled with a heavenly aroma. The meal, born not of pride, but of devotion, was prepared.

Chāṅgadeva watched in silent reverence. He, who had seen gods and sages, now saw something greater: the joy of loving service to the Lord.

After the meal, Chāṅgadeva spoke: “I am blessed beyond words. But there remains one thing—your letter. The one with only mysterious syllables. What was its meaning?”

Jnāneśvar looked at him with a smile that held oceans of compassion, “That letter was not a riddle—it was the sound of the soul before it is clouded by pride and division. It spoke the essence of unity in the Lord.”

Chāṅgadeva folded his palms once more, “I now understand. Powers fade. Knowledge withers. But the company of devotees, the shelter of saints, and the path of loving devotion—these alone remain. You have shown me the gateway to eternal joy.”

And from that day, the mighty yogi Chāṅgadeva became a humble servant of the devotees, walking the path of bhakti, singing the glories of the Lord, and proclaiming to all: “Of all places of pilgrimage, Alandī is supreme, for there reside the children of Lord Viṭṭhala, whose every word awakens the soul.”

As soon as Jnāndev’s mystical letter was received, its words—laced with spiritual depth and divine potency—began to cast their impression upon the hearts of Chāṅgadeva’s disciples. Though the meaning was cryptic, its impact was undeniable. It was as if Indra himself had acknowledged: “This is no ordinary speech. This is divine.” A decision loomed in the air, and the time had come to test their sincerity.

There were fourteen hundred disciples in Chāṅgadeva’s company. One among them stepped forward and said hesitantly, “Let us reflect overnight. At dawn, we shall give our answer.”

But the suggestion unsettled the hearts of the disciples. Fear sprouted within their minds like a creeping vine. They began whispering among themselves, “Will one of us have to offer our life? Who among us will it be? For whom shall this sacrifice be demanded?”

Restlessness filled the night. None could find peace. Fear clutched their hearts, and the thought of bodily loss grew unbearable. They rose and paced, some murmuring, some weeping silently. The hours passed, filled with anxiety and doubts.

“We have eaten so many offerings at the guru’s side. We’ve been served with such love and care,” they muttered. “Yet now, our hearts are racing to flee from him.”

They recalled how their master had once placed blessings upon their heads, how prosperity had entered their homes by his mercy. But now, it seemed, those blessings demanded something in return—and they weren’t ready to offer it.

Some thought, “Perhaps this is the unfolding of our past karmas. It all happened so suddenly—this path, this master. Maybe we were drawn into it too easily. Maybe his renunciation is just a show.”

Others accused him within their hearts. “He enchanted us with spiritual spells, taught us strange mantras, and now our lives are in danger. We see no clear way forward.”

So, in fear, each disciple began spinning his own excuses, seeking a path of escape. Meanwhile, as night descended and stars quietly glimmered above, Chāṅgadeva offered his evening prayers. At the same time, Śrī Jnāndev, with his brothers Nivṛtti and Sopān, continued their daily harikīrtan, singing the glories of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga. Chāṅgadeva joined them, listening in silence, though his own disciples were conspiring to flee.

In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, it is said that in this age of Kali, no practice surpasses the chanting of the Lord’s holy names. It is the very path to liberation. Beginning every deed with the names Keśava, Nārāyaṇa, and ending with Viṣṇu-smaraṇa—such practice purifies even the gravest of faults.

Had not Ajāmila, though immersed in sin, attained liberation by calling out his son’s name—Nārāyaṇa? The Lord’s messengers came and took him to Vaikuṇṭha. Such is the power of the holy name.

Even the courtesan redeemed by Śuka’s mere utterance of “Rāghava,” even Puṇḍalīka—who, by honoring his parents, brought the Supreme Lord Himself to stand eternally on a brick for the sake of bhaktas—these stories show how the Lord personally uplifts the humble and fallen.

It was this very Lord, Viṭṭhala, whose form Jnāndev established in the hearts of the devotees through kīrtan. That night, he performed ārati, waved lamps before the Lord, offered sanctified food to all, and bowed reverently to his elder brother Nivṛtti.

As the saints rested, Chāṅgadeva went to his chamber. His disciples came and served him as usual, but inside, their minds had already fled. They plotted among themselves, frightened of the possibility that one of them would be offered as a sacrifice.

Then Chāṅgadeva spoke solemnly to them: “Jnāndev has written me a mysterious letter. Its meaning is deep and hidden. One with insight must explain it.”

But the disciples, though outwardly respectful, were inwardly unsteady. They said, “Master, we have offered ourselves to you. Now act as you see fit.” Yet inwardly, they clung to their bodies and desires.

These were not disciples in truth. They were like bitter fruits dressed to look like sweet ones. Outwardly, they wore the robes of renunciants; inwardly, they were merchants of ego and fear.

Such is the nature of those who take to spiritual life for gain. When tested, they turn away. And so, in the stillness of night, every one of the fourteen hundred disciples fled. Not one remained. This was Jnāndev’s divine strategy—to free Chāṅgadeva from false association.

When dawn arrived, Chāṅgadeva awoke and called out to his disciples—but no one replied. He searched around, but the place was empty. It was as if a mighty general had been deserted by his soldiers in battle.

He performed his morning ācamana, recited prayers, and offered ārati to the Lord as he had always done. Then, Śrī Jnāndev approached him and said, "Today is a sacred day, an auspicious time. Let us discuss the letter. Who among your disciples will come forward for sacrifice?"

Chāṅgadeva called out again, but silence answered him. Realization dawned. They had all abandoned him.

A wave of sorrow and repentance surged within him. "All these years," he lamented, "I gathered disciples, performed austerities, mastered mystical arts. I even displayed siddhis before the world. But not one soul stood by me today."

"What is this hollow fame, this useless renown?" he cried. "What have I truly gained? Let me give up this path of false power and seek only the shelter of the saints."

With a broken heart and humbled soul, Chāṅgadeva turned to Jnāndev and said, "Please accept this body of mine as an offering. I seek not escape, but understanding. Reveal to me the true meaning of your instruction."

He wept and said, "My disciples fled, clinging to life. But I remain—alone, surrendered. I bring to you my body, mind, and all my accomplishments. Judge my sincerity, Lord—my heart hides nothing from you."

Hearing these heartfelt words, Jnāndev smiled gently and informed Nivṛtti and Muktabāī of the transformation. "See," he said, "those who clung to false prestige have fled. But the one we hoped to uplift has now become humble."

Muktābāī laughed softly, and with her brothers' consent, she stepped forward to instruct Chāṅgadeva. Seeing that he had become a worthy vessel, she lovingly prepared to bless him.

After he had bathed and completed his morning devotions, she had him sit before her. Then, with her own mouth, Muktābāī began to instruct him in simple yet profound truths—not of impersonal merging, but of seeing the Lord in all things and surrendering fully in bhakti.

She said: "O soul, realize who you are. Look within, and recognize the Lord who dwells therein. In day and night, remain absorbed in His remembrance. Go beyond the flickering distractions of this world, And hold fast to the loving devotion of the Lord alone."

Thus instructed, Chāṅgadeva bowed at her feet with tears streaming down his cheeks. A light burst within him—not a void, but the presence of the Lord in all creation. Wherever he looked, he now saw Pāṇḍuraṅga, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

The pride of learning, of yogic accomplishments, of mystical powers—all fell away. Not because he lost identity, but because he gained his true identity as a servant of the Lord (dāsa-bhāva).

Now the world did not appear empty or illusionary—it appeared full of the Lord's presence. Waking or dreaming, in mountain or river, he saw the Lord smiling upon him.

This was not self-annihilation, but self-realization in divine relationship. Chāṅgadeva was no longer the master, no longer the yogi seeking control. He was now a humble servant, guided by the mercy of the saints and surrendered at the feet of the Lord.

The realization was complete. But not through merging or impersonality. Through bhakti, through grace, and through the personal embrace of the Lord and His devotees.

And thus, by the mercy of Śrī Muktābāī and Śrī Jnāndev, the ancient yogī Chāṅgadeva attained his true destination—not the void, but the feet of the Lord.

For an entire month, the great yogī Chāṅgadeva remained in the holy company of Śrī Jnāndev and his divine siblings. Each night, under the canopy of stars, he would sit amidst the assembled devotees and listen with rapt attention to the kīrtans that echoed through Āḷaṅkāpurī. The names of the Lord were sung with such fervor and sweetness that his heart, once immersed in mystical yogic powers, now found a deeper fulfilment in surrender and devotion.

Throughout this month, he engaged earnestly in śravaṇa (devotional hearing), manana (reflection), and nididhyāsana (loving contemplation). No longer did he seek impersonal liberation; his heart now longed for loving connection with the Lord. Night and day, in the company of saintly devotees, he tasted the essence of bhakti, and his mind began to rest completely upon the Lord's sweet, flute-playing form—Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the supreme object of devotion.

One day, Jnāndev turned to him with a gentle smile and asked, "Dear Chāṅgadeva, a full month has passed since you came into our midst. Tell me honestly—has the meaning of my letter now taken root in your heart?"

Hearing these compassionate words, Chāṅgadeva was overwhelmed. With great humility, he fell at Jnāndev's lotus feet, his eyes brimming with tears. Rising with folded hands, he began to speak—not in prose, but in sacred abhaṅgas, sung with deep feeling.

He said, “When a dry riverbed is suddenly filled with a flood, the people panic and cry, ‘We are drowning!’ But no one looks to the cause—the torrent of ignorance and pride. Whether they are on this shore or that, all are swept away. Even without water, they lose their way. Such is the condition of the world. But by the merciful company of Jnāndev and Muktabāī—saintly siblings who are like a divine boat crossing the ocean of material life—I, Chāṅgadeva, have now reached the far shore. I am saved, not by my penances, but by your grace.”

He bowed deeply to the four siblings and said, “Today I declare from my heart—the truth has been planted within me like a seed, and by your mercy, it has blossomed into divine understanding.”

Hearing these sincere words, Jnāndev’s heart filled with joy. He said with affectionate pride, “Indeed, your birth in this age was meant to uplift your soul through devotion. You have now understood the path of truth.”

Then Muktabāī, the divine mother among saints, spoke gently, “O venerable sage! For 1,400 years you have carried this body. Now, by the Lord’s mercy, it has become sanctified, a temple of the divine. Let me now guide you further. Renounce this old vessel and take new birth in the spirit of bhakti. Dedicate yourself to the loving worship of Lord Viṣṇu. Let your heart overflow with love and surrender in every act of service. Remember well—without devotion to Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga, no quality, however exalted, is truly pure. One must worship His personal, beautiful form—not merely as a concept or light—but as the ever-blissful Lord who lovingly accepts the offerings of His devotees. Therefore, sing the glorious deeds of Śrī Rāma and Śrī Kṛṣṇa! Let your kīrtans be filled with remembrance of the Lord’s līlās. In this way, not only will you find perfection, but the entire world will rise with you in joy. In this age of quarrel and hypocrisy—Kali-yuga—no practice surpasses the chanting of the holy names. Go at once to Paṇḍharpur, the blessed abode of Viṭṭhala, and behold the Lord who holds Rukmiṇī-devī’s hand with eternal love.”

Receiving these divine instructions, Chāṅgadeva clasped Muktabāī’s feet, his tears falling upon them like sacred water. He said, “Your words are divine commandments. I shall carry them out fully, without hesitation or neglect.”

In that sacred moment, he bowed again to all four siblings. With great devotion, he declared, “I shall now worship you, my sadgurus, who have delivered me from the dark ocean of pride and illusion. How can I repay such compassion?”

With love and scriptural faith, Chāṅgadeva began the ṣoḍaśopacāra worship—the sixteen forms of service. He offered sandalwood paste, fresh flowers, and fragrant tulasī garlands. He lit incense sticks, waved lamps before his gurus, and presented sacred food with a joyful heart. He gave charitable gifts to all assembled and distributed the prasāda with humility.

Loudly chanting the holy name—“Śrī Viṭṭhala! Śrī Viṭṭhala!”—he offered full prostrations. Then, with heartfelt reverence, he declared: “Blessed is Nivṛtti, master of yoga, a form of Śiva now revealed as a saint! Blessed is Jnāndev, the true form of the sadguru! Just by seeing

him, countless souls are freed. Blessed is Sopān, none other than Prajāpati incarnate. And Muktabāī—she is Ādiśakti Herself, the divine Mother! Even their names uplift the world. Such glories I sing today."

He then took flowers in both hands and offered his praises in sacred mantras. Seeking their permission, he requested to travel to Vaṭeśvara to continue his sādhana.

With his throat choked in emotion and his eyes overflowing with blissful tears, he said, "How blessed is the vision I have received today! My heart is full, and I shall carry your grace forever."

As he walked away, Chāṅgadeva turned again and again to behold the four saints. He bowed repeatedly, his soul soaked in divine gratitude.

But soon after, unable to bear separation, Jnāndev and his siblings summoned Chāṅgadeva back to their maṭha. Their lives were not lived for personal gain—they existed only to serve the world through devotion and truth.

Whether awake, dreaming, or in deep sleep, their consciousness was fixed on the form of Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga, standing with His hands on His hips, playing His flute. Each night, kīrtans would fill the air, and the entire village would gather joyfully.

By day, families would study the Jnāneśwarī, and together reflect on the wisdom of Vedānta in the light of bhakti. The village of Āḷaṅkāpurī had become like a living Vaikuṇṭha—a mirror of Paṇḍharpur itself.

Blessed are those who dwell within that sacred radius. Where Jnāndev resides, the Lord Himself dwells in every heart. The mere presence of His devotees sanctifies the land.

Blessed is the river Indrayāṇī, mother of all holy rivers! Even the gods rush to bathe in her sacred waters at midday. The confluence of her currents with the holy presence of saints redeems all souls.

Wherever such Vaiṣṇava saints incarnate, that place becomes Vaikuṇṭha. There, the names of God resound without cease, and even the servants of Yama are powerless to enter. In such holy villages, Kali-yuga has no influence. Every inhabitant is radiant, bearing the signs of eternal spiritual life. What a wonder!

Ah! This sacred scripture, Bhaktalīlāmṛta, is truly the nectar of devotion. These stories are rooted in Paṇḍharpur, where Pundalīk—the great devotee—remains eternally present, serving the Lord's lotus feet.

Beyond even liberation lies bhakti—the fourth and highest path. Such is the sanctity of the Chandrabhāgā and Bhīmarathī rivers. One who merely beholds their sacred waters is uplifted forever. The highest bliss, the true joy of the soul, is not found in dry knowledge, but in the

sound of Lord Kṛṣṇa's flute. Where His melodies play, there stands Śrī Govinda—alive and compassionate. There, in Paṇḍharpur, the Lord stands on the brick with His hands on His hips. To every sincere devotee who comes, He gives darśan and embraces them to His heart. That dark, tender Lord—the very soul of the universe—becomes the focus of all hearts. Even mighty kings bow at His feet, and all serve Him with devotion.

Thus ends the Fifth Chapter of Bhaktalīlāmṛta, fulfilling all hearts simply through hearing. May its nectar forever flow through the ears and hearts of those who seek divine love.

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Chapter 6

Obeisance unto Śrī Gaṇeśa

Fortunate indeed is the soul who attains the rare gift of a human body. Yet alas, if such a one fails to glorify the Supreme Lord Śrī Hari, then what is the use? Immersed in worldly affairs, that person remains no better than a beast. All creatures—whether human or animal—engage in eating, sleeping, mating. If a human being indulges solely in these, bereft of devotion, how is such a life distinguished? By divine will, one attains the human form. It must be used meaningfully: visiting sacred tīrthas, performing penance, cultivating genuine remorse for sins. One must worship Lord Viṣṇu in earnest devotion—offering obeisance with the body, beholding saints with the eyes, hearing divine glories with the ears. Live righteously in the world, yet let compassion flow: offer water to the thirsty, food to the hungry. Speak the truth even at the risk of life, and let the tongue always utter the names of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Govinda. Apart from this, I, the humble soul, desire no other sādhana. Even if kings bow at my feet, I ask only to be rightly guided by Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga.

In previous episodes, it was told how Changadeva received instruction, and today, by the order of Jnāndev, he arrives at Vaṭeśvara. Muktābāī had instructed him: "Quickly assume another body, engage in the worship of Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga, and fix your remembrance upon Him alone."

So Changadeva journeyed to Vaṭeśvarī, offered prostrated obeisances to the fair-complexioned Lord, worshipped Him with full paraphernalia, and swiftly departed. He then crossed the bank of the Tapti River and quickly proceeded to Torṇamāḷ. There, manifest before him, stood none other than Śrī Gorakṣanātha—the very incarnation of Viṣṇu Himself! He had appeared in Kali-yuga to deliver the world, although being all-powerful, He wandered renounced, beyond desire and aversion. At the sacred moment, Gorakṣa gave a divine command, and Changadeva offered respectful obeisances. He worshipped his Guru with devotion in his heart. Knowing the tradition of the Gorakṣa lineage, Changadeva honored his Guru with great reverence. Gorakṣa too, acknowledging his devotion, praised him as a perfected soul dwelling in his home. With delight in his heart, Changadeva glorified his Master: "Just seeing Your loving devotion, Lord Śiva himself has appeared!"

The Vaṭeśvara, hearing these divine glories, had also revealed many miracles to the mortals of this world. After this, Gorakṣa spoke kindly to Changadeva: "Tell me, what lies in your heart? What purpose brought you here? Speak freely and without duplicity."

Changadeva bowed and humbly submitted, "O Master, hear my one desire. In Vaṭeśvarī, I witnessed a wondrous vision—devotees performing strict penance with deep yearning for a child, not even partaking food. Pleased by their devotion, Lord Vaṭeśvara instructed me—by order of Śaṅkara Himself—to fulfill their heartfelt wish. In a dream, I spoke to the couple

and asked, 'What is your desire? Tell me immediately.' Today is the sacred day decreed by the bull-bannered Lord Śiva, and so I come to You, with this concern in my heart. Where do they live? What do they seek—offspring or wealth? Please allow me to serve them."

After hearing this, the learned brāhmaṇa spoke: "Our hearts are constantly fixed upon the Lord's lotus feet. Just as a child seeks nourishment from the mother, so too we seek the grace of saints such as You. Our only hope is to have a son like You. That alone will uplift our entire lineage."

Bowing with great humility, the couple offered prostrated obeisances. Pleased, I granted their wish on the spot. That very same Gorakṣanātha, incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu and master yogī, wanders the earth for the upliftment of all souls. He shall one day come to their house for alms. When He plays His conch or horn, a divine sound will fill the air. Until then, remain ever vigilant. Let no one turn away this guest, no matter how unassuming. The Brahmana begged humbly: "You have granted us Your assurance. What are its signs? I shall return after twelve years, in the form of a child," I promised them, offering my sacred word. Thus, taking my blessing, the brāhmaṇa returned home. From that moment, they engaged in deep spiritual practice.

Eleven years passed. Now six months remained. The couple informed their Lord with eager anticipation, "The month of Śrāvaṇa is most auspicious. Nagapancamī draws near—a most blessed day.

"On that very day, I must come," the Lord assured. "There, the divine sound shall manifest."

Hearing this, Gorakṣanātha said to Changadeva, "We shall come to that place and fulfill their desire." Thus spoke the yogeśvara and, having inquired further, swiftly set out. Arriving at the banks of the Tapti River, he bowed before Śrī Vaṭeśvara.

For the next six months, Changadeva concealed himself from the world, exhibiting the yogeśvara's divine, mysterious pastimes. Not far from the city stood the sacred pond Nārāyaṇa Doho.

There lived Mūdhopant, a devout brāhmaṇa and village record keeper. A strict follower of the Yajurveda, generous and virtuous, he performed daily sacrifices and gave food to all beings. His wife, Rukmiṇī, was a chaste and pious woman. Both were absorbed in remembrance of Changadeva. Even as they went about their daily tasks—waking, dreaming, or sleeping—they saw Changadeva in their minds.

"We were promised," they thought, "that he would take birth as our son. That vow can never prove false."

Their minds firm in this conviction, they awaited the sacred sign—the sound of the horn that would announce his coming. Thus passed much time. Finally, Nagapancamī approached. They fasted and chanted constantly, awaiting the fruit of their devotion. Four days later, Gorakṣa arrived at their door for alms. Proclaiming "Alakh!", he called out at the gate. He

appeared radiant—his golden form smeared with white sacred ash. Divine earrings glimmered; his eyes glowed with grace. Seeing him, the brāhmaṇa couple were astonished. Rushing inside, they brought alms with reverence. In that instant, the memory of Changadeva's promise flashed before them. With purified hearts, they bowed before Gorakṣa. Pleased, the yogeśvara said, "Today your desire shall be fulfilled!" Lifting his divine puṅgī (horn), he blew into it, releasing a celestial sound. The sound of that nāda (divine vibration) reached the ears of goddess Rakhumāī, who listened in joy and awe. And lo! At that very moment, a wondrous child appeared in their courtyard, radiating with 32 auspicious marks. Gorakṣanātha then disappeared into the unseen, and Mūdhopant, returning home, learned of this miraculous event. Rukmiṇī explained, "A divine yogi came and blew his horn. At that very moment, this beautiful child appeared before me."

Recalling the old promise, she exclaimed, "Surely Vaṭeśvara has been pleased, and Changadeva's vow fulfilled. This boy is the fruit of that boon!" Changadeva's promise had now borne fruit. The divine word once spoken was fulfilled. He lifted the radiant child with joy, while Rukmiṇī, overwhelmed by maternal affection, embraced the newborn, her heart brimming with peace and fulfillment. Joy surged through their home like a sacred river. Auspicious instruments played festive tunes, echoing through the village lanes. Sweet delicacies made with ginger and jaggery were shared from house to house, and the people marvelled at the wonder that had occurred. After bathing the child, they gently laid him down in the cradle. And in that very moment, Rukmiṇī felt the milk well up in her breasts—an awe-inspiring arrangement by the Lord Himself. The child was adorned with every mark of divine fortune. One glimpse at him filled the eyes with reverence and the heart with delight. People whispered among themselves, "Surely, a divine being—perhaps one of the Marudgaṇas—has incarnated again."

Astrologers and seers were summoned. That very day, they read his horoscope. Alms were distributed generously to all seekers, and the couple's hearts overflowed with bliss. The entire town celebrated the birth. In every household, there was joy and festivity. "In our very village," they said, "the Yogeśvara has taken birth!"

On the twelfth day, the sacred naming ceremony was held. The child was placed in the cradle with love and reverence. He was given the name Changadeva, and sweet fried treats—ghuḍya—were shared with all. It was by observing austerity at Vaṭeśvarī that Mūdhopant and Rukmiṇī had received this priceless blessing. The child soon began to crawl and speak, learning quickly, and displaying noble virtues and a pleasing form. At the age of five, his sacred thread ceremony was performed. He received the Gāyatrī-mantra, and Mūdhopant's joy knew no bounds. For four days they celebrated, with offerings and feasting. The noble brāhmaṇas were honored with sumptuous meals and generous gifts. And young Changadeva's intelligence was soon recognized—he began reciting the Vedic hymns flawlessly. To the surprise of all, his guru barely had to teach him anything. The knowledge seemed to be remembered from past lives. He mastered all four Vedas and could recite the

śāstras fluently. In poetry and grammar, he became proficient. Scholars were astonished and flocked from distant places just to see him. They said, "This boy must be a reincarnation of Prajāpati. All the Vedic sounds seem to pour naturally from his lips. He is indeed a master of the Bhāgavata." Others speculated, "Could this be Vyāsa himself, reborn?" The greatest of scholars praised him with hymns and glorified his name.

Recognizing his divine nature, the people brought offerings. Fine clothes and ornaments were gifted, and his parents rejoiced deeply in their hearts. Out of gratitude for Lord Vaṭeśvara's grace, Mūdhopant devoted himself fully to service. Changadeva, even as a child, repaid this with loyalty and wisdom. He soon became prosperous, mastering fourteen branches of knowledge and all sixty-four arts. Whatever he studied once remained in his memory. His character and brilliance drew the attention of the noble and wealthy. Great sums were gifted to him, and the people suggested, "Let us offer our daughter to this divine youth." Thousands of gold coins were given as dowry. A wedding date was fixed, and joy flooded everyone's hearts. The auspicious rituals were performed—devaka, the family deity worship, feasting of brāhmaṇas, and ceremonial prayers—all unfolded smoothly. As the priests chanted aṣṭakas and recited oṁ puṇyāha, the sound of festive drums echoed joyfully. The entire celebration lasted four glorious days. When the bride and groom were brought home, Mūdhopant greeted them with love. Lavish gifts were given to the groom, and his heart swelled with divine contentment. "Surely," he thought, "some great merit from past lives has brought Yogeśvara into our home, as our son!"

As years passed, Changadeva remained strict in his vows—bathing at the three junctions of the day, observing his sandhyā, and keeping the sacred fire alive at home. Guests were honored with devotion, and food was always available for all. No one ever went hungry in his house. Everything was well-managed, and no one was dependent on another for sustenance. He lived as a householder for twenty-four years, dutifully serving his father with profound love. In this, he found great joy. Other sons may be born, but they often cause pain to their parents. Some even separate after growing up, disregarding their parents' love and care. A cruel son is worse than a worm in the belly. Such ungrateful children, who do not serve their parents, are lower than pigs. Yet Changadeva was like Pundalika, the great brāhmaṇa known for his supreme filial devotion. Even Nārada could not fathom the extent of his merit.

When Nārada beheld Pundalika's pure devotion to his parents, he rushed to Dvārakā and informed Śrī Kṛṣṇa of the event. He said, "O Lord of Rukmiṇī! Pundalika is serving his parents with such love and care. You must go to see him. That vision alone will bring You peace." Upon hearing this, Lord Hari Himself came to Pundalika's door. Folding His hands, He stood on a brick (viṭā) and remained there eternally. Such is the power of parental service—even the Lord Himself remains indebted. Captivated by Pundalika's bhakti, the Lord now forever stands at his doorstep. He stands there still—gentle and radiant—with both hands on His waist. Devotees gather in great numbers to behold Him. For one who wishes to attain the

Supreme Lord, filial devotion is essential. Through this, both material and spiritual perfection are surely attained. Even ritual baths, sandhyā, yajnas, tapas, pilgrimages, Vedas, and Purāṇas—without filial devotion—are but hollow.

Knowing this well, the great yogi Changadeva served his father with unwavering obedience. He never defied even the smallest of his father's commands. After twenty-four blessed years, Mūdhopant's time in this world came to an end. Because of Changadeva's virtue, his father received timely rites and purification. At the very moment of passing, his soul ascended to Vaikuṇṭha. Overcome with grief and devotion, Rukmiṇī resolved to follow her husband in sati. The final rites were conducted properly. Changadeva, with a heart full of humility, undertook the Gayā pilgrimage for ancestral redemption, spending large sums in charity. Returning to his hometown, he came again to Nārāyaṇa Doho, and re-entered his family home. Seeing his father's wealth, he called the brāhmaṇas and distributed it all in charity. Having become utterly detached, he offered the village estate to the family's spiritual heir, and began contemplating his next move with caution and devotion. He said, "My mother, Muktābāī, had once instructed me—'Go to Paṇḍharpur at once and behold the feet of Viṭhobā!'"

For Paṇḍharī is the eternal abode of the saints, Vaikuṇṭha on earth, where the Lord stands forever at Pundalika's door. Even a single glimpse of the Lord there liberates fallen souls, and the Lord melts at the love of even the lowliest of men. With this holy purpose in his heart, Changadeva set off to Paṇḍharpur. Within him was a thrill of divine joy. "I shall now meet Rukmiṇī's beloved," he thought. He joined the pilgrimage—dīṇḍīs with banners, drums, cymbals, and sacred chants rang through the skies. With love, he sang kīrtans at every step, until he reached the fields of Paṇḍharī, where the holy name resounded with joy. The devotees clapped and sang in ecstasy. Approaching the sacred town, a miracle occurred before all eyes. Every pride—of caste, birth, and ego—dissolved. Each person offered full prostrated obeisances to one another, regardless of status. Even proud brāhmaṇas bowed to all, overwhelmed by the sweetness of love. Seeing this, Changadeva's heart filled with astonishment. Letting go of his own prestige, he too fell in prostration before all. Meeting saints, Vaiṣṇavas, and noble souls, he continued the pilgrimage in bliss. They reached the Bhīmā River, bathed joyfully, and kept their daily vows. They visited Pundalika's shrine and offered ṣoḍaśopacāra worship to the Lord. After circumambulating the kṣetra, they stood at the mahādvāra, where Changadeva prostrated himself, and tears of love flowed from his eyes, "Oh, how blessed is this birth!" he cried. "Today, I have seen Paṇḍharpur with my own eyes. All my miseries have ended—I am filled with divine bliss!"

With this realization, he offered obeisances to Garuḍa and Hanumān, and quickly entered the temple. As he approached the sanctum, he saw with his eyes the Supreme Lord in a saguna form—a small, charming deity standing with arms resting on His waist atop a brick. Clothed in golden silk, He radiated a divine glow. His face was so sweet, Changadeva lost all awareness of the body. His throat adorned with soft tulasī garlands, the Lord stood in still

beauty. Changadeva rushed forward and embraced Him in his heart. Filled with paramānanda, he began his prayerful stuti: “All glories to You, Lord of Rukmiṇī, the Supreme amongst gods, the All-pervading One in the three worlds! O Lord of Paṇḍharī, embodiment of pure consciousness, You have descended to carry us across the ocean of saṁsāra. Your very darśana shatters illusion. A single glance from You snaps all bonds of birth and death. You reside secretly in the hearts of Your devotees and converse with them in love. By merely chanting Your name, even the gravest sins are burned away. Those devoted to You attain unbroken yoga. I, Changadeva—Your servant’s servant—have surrendered to You, O Lord of Paṇḍharī. Let Your grace destroy the illusion of material life.”

Tears poured from his eyes as he spoke. Then, with love, he fell at the Lord’s feet in sāṣṭāṅga namaskāra. Fixing the Lord’s form in his heart, he stored it as a treasure in the abode of his soul. Then Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā appeared and blessed him with their darśana. At the mahādvāra, he led another joyous kīrtana. The devotees roared in glorification, and the skies echoed with praise, “Kṛṣṇa! Viṣṇu! Hari! Govinda! Acyuta! Ananta! Mukunda! Blissful Supreme Lord! O beloved of the devotees! O Lotus-eyed One, wearing yellow garments! O soul of the universe! Ornament of the saints, Guru of the world! To uplift the ignorant, You came to meet Pundalika. With both hands on Your waist, You stand on the banks of the Bhīmā. You deliver even the worst sinners—thieves, adulterers, and killers—by Your darśana alone!”

Thus praising the Lord, he sang the maṅgala-āratī and waved the lamps to Rukmiṇīpati, bowing down in full surrender. It was the day of Paurṇimā, and the divine celebration of Gopālkāla filled Changadeva with wonder and ecstasy. As the grand yātrā—the sacred pilgrimage—slowly came to an end, the ocean of devotees who had gathered began to disperse. Seeing this, Chāṅgadeva stood in thought. “What now shall I do?” he asked himself. For he knew, the true object of pilgrimage was not in the crowd, but in the essence—the very embodiment of the sacred tīrtha, now hidden deep within the mystic whirlpool of consciousness. Yet, who could truly grasp or believe this?

He pondered deeply: “That One who is the compassionate deliverer of the fallen, the bestower of ultimate liberation—may I behold Him with these very eyes.” With this yearning rooted deep in his heart, Chāṅgadeva sat down in solemn resolve, undertaking a vow of intense spiritual discipline. For three full days, with unwavering concentration, he remained absorbed in contemplation. Neither did he eat fruit, nor root, nor even water. His entire being was immersed in the meditation of the divine form of the Lord—the Tīrtha-mūrti.

At that time, curious listeners approached the sage who was narrating this tale. With sincere inquiry, they asked, “How is it that another form of the Lord dwells in the waters of the Candrabhāgā? What is the nature of this mystery?”

To this, the narrator responded with enthusiasm, “Hear now this most wondrous tale, the glorious story of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga! It is a secret declared by none other than Śrī Vyāsa himself—that the Supreme Soul of the universe has taken residence in Paṇḍharpur.”

There He stands in manifest form, atop the brick, in His eternal mūrti. The tīrtha itself has taken form—on the banks of the Candrabhāgā—where the hidden Lord Śrīdhara abides in divine stillness. There too resides the exalted sage, Puṇḍalīka, in his divine body, and beside him, the Lord of Lords, the wielder of the Sudarśana-cakra, stands in person. At that very place flows the sacred Bhīmarathī from above, encircling the divine beings.

Longing to behold that most divine form with his own eyes, Chāṅgadeva continued his anuṣṭhāna. "O Lord of all lords, giver of liberation! I hunger for a vision of You!" he cried from the depths of his heart. For three days the yogī remained absorbed, unwavering in his meditation. The ocean of compassion—the Lord Himself—was moved by the sincerity of Chāṅgadeva's heart. He appeared before him. The deity of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga became imprinted in Chāṅgadeva's heart. Just as sages describe the final resting place of yogic meditation—so too did that place become his sanctuary. He beheld the Lord, standing with both hands placed firmly on His hips, His lotus feet on the brick, resplendent and utterly enchanting. At the very sight, Chāṅgadeva lost all bodily awareness. He beheld the crown, the radiant earrings, the effulgent yellow garments glowing against His blue complexion. Śrīvatsa and Kaustubha gems adorned His chest, and makara-shaped earrings danced on His cheeks. Thus revealing His divine form, Śrī Hari lovingly addressed Chāṅgadeva: "Now awaken, O seeker! Turn your gaze inward and behold Me with the eyes of devotion."

Overwhelmed, Chāṅgadeva said, "How is it that I, alone on the banks of the Bhīmā, now hear such divine speech? Has midnight fallen? Who speaks thus with celestial voice?"

He opened his eyes—and lo! He saw a wondrous sight: that very divine form which Brahmā and others seek through endless meditation, which poets strive to describe in countless verses, now stood before him. Like the breaking of the impossible, a radiant blaze had appeared—like the rising of a million suns. Such was the exquisite beauty of the Lord's form that Chāṅgadeva found peace simply in beholding Him. At that moment, seeing Lord Viṣṇu with his very eyes, his mind was completely captivated. He fell flat to the ground in full prostration, tears of love flowing from his heart. "O Lord, have mercy!" he cried. "Cast Your merciful glance upon me. Pull me out of this ocean of material suffering. Free me from the clutches of illusion!"

Thus praying, he lovingly placed his head at the Lord's lotus feet, and praised Him, "You are the deliverer of the destitute, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, the savior of the universe, the jagad-guru! I am now Your surrendered soul—blessed am I to behold You! May this life become meaningful by Your mercy!"

With a heart full of devotion, he began a heartfelt hymn of praise, "Victory to You, the Self of all! You alone pervade the three worlds! Victory to You, O ocean-dwelling Lord! Victory to the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha! Victory to You, the Lord of all devotees, the embodiment of non-duality—O Pāṇḍuraṅga! Victory to You in the form of Matsya, the destroyer of Śaṅkha-asura! Victory to You as Kūrma, who churned the ocean! Victory to Your Varāha form, slayer of demons, ornament of the universe! Victory to You, Narasiṁha, protector of

Prahlāda! You are the Vāmana who stood at Bali's gates, the Parashurāma who humbled the kṣatriyas. You were the friend of the Pāṇḍavas, the protector of dharma, Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself! Victory to You, Buddha avatāra, who gave life to the world; victory to the one who vanquishes the impious Mlecchas in Kali-yuga! O giver of boons to Puṇḍalīka, husband of Rukmiṇī—Your glories are endless and beyond compare! Though I am devoid of service, bereft of devotion, lacking in knowledge and renunciation—still, I come to You as a surrendered soul. Kindly nourish me with Your mercy."

Hearing this humble and fervent prayer, the Lord of Rukmiṇī was pleased and smiled. He spoke, "O Chāṅgadeva, if there is any desire in your heart, speak it now, without hesitation. Whatever wish lies within you, I shall fulfill it. Cast off all doubt and speak freely."

Chāṅgadeva, overjoyed, said: "O my Lord! Bestow Your grace upon me in such a way that my soul may find eternal peace. Let me receive a mantra which, when merely heard, brings both material and spiritual liberation. Let me use this to serve others as well."

Hearing this noble request, the Lord of Paṇḍharpur took Chāṅgadeva by the hand and led him directly into the sacred waters of the Bhīmā. As soon as he was immersed, Chāṅgadeva beheld a miraculous vision: a golden pavilion, adorned with shimmering jewels and radiant gems—something no eye in the mortal realm could behold. Hidden within the very waters of the river, this mystic region stood revealed. There stood the sage Puṇḍalīka in a divine form, and before him, Lord Rukmiṇīpati—the Lord of Lords—manifested in resplendent glory. That sacred place was not of this world; it was a divine replica of Vaikuṇṭha. Even the wisest of worldly minds could not grasp it. By special fortune, Chāṅgadeva was brought there, and out of compassion, the Lord of the universe personally gave him instruction. Just as He had once placed His hand on the heads of the Sanaka sages, Śrī Hari now bestowed upon Chāṅgadeva the powerful six-syllable mantra—"Om Namo Nārāyaṇāya."

The mantra, like nectar, like a divine life-giving elixir, could revive even the lifeless. With great affection, the Lord gave Chāṅgadeva this secret, and spoke lovingly: "Do not fear. Let your heart rejoice in this assurance. You are now protected under My shelter."

Then, as a tender father hides behind the veil of illusion for the sake of the child's play, the Lord withdrew His visible form. When Chāṅgadeva opened his eyes again, he saw the world returned to its ordinary state. Yet within, the flame of divine experience remained. He reflected, "By the Lord's mercy, I have seen the Supreme directly. He gave me the six-syllable mantra. Even the memory of it now fills my heart with joy!"

Overwhelmed with spiritual ecstasy, he hurried to the main temple of Paṇḍharpur, and there, he worshiped the mūrti of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga with full rituals—ṣoḍaśopacāra. He offered sweet incense, lamps, garlands, and waved the lamp in great love. Falling flat before the Deity, he offered prayers and stored the deity form of the Lord deep in his heart, "O Viṭhobā, O ocean of compassion," he said, "now I must return to my village. But may Your divine

affection always remain upon me!" Tears streamed from his eyes. He sought the Lord's permission, circumambulated the entire kṣetra, and then turned to Puṇḍalīka, offering respects, before setting off with his companions. As he journeyed, he kept looking back toward Paṇḍharpur, his heart brimming with longing. With tearful eyes, he sang the name of Viṭṭhala, narrating His glorious pastimes. He inspired countless people to take up the path of devotion. Even those who had never known bhakti were now immersed in kīrtana.

"Those who truly desire the Lord," he said, "must seek the company of sādhus—for there is no greater means in this age."

In this way, many began following the path of devotion through the association of Chāṅgadeva. With love, they listened and sang the glories of Śrī Hari. Thus, the great Vaiṣṇava hero approached the village of Nārāyaṇ Doha. Seeing him, the villagers came forward with folded hands, offering respects. Overcome with love, they greeted Chāṅgadeva joyfully. Mṛdaṅgas, tālas, and cymbals played in all directions. Dīṇḍīs arrived with banners, auspicious instruments played ahead, and fragrant powders were thrown while garlands adorned the necks of all. In such divine celebration, Chāṅgadeva entered his own home. Performing pancārati with devotion, he lovingly worshiped Śrī Hari once more. Falling flat in prostration, he distributed prasāda to all. The people declared in unison: "Today is a most blessed day!"

Thus concludes this sublime episode of Bhaktalīlāmṛta, where Lord Rukmiṇīkānta, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, reveals the nectar of devotion to His beloved servant.

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Chapter 7

Obeisance unto Śrī Gaṇeśa

Once, in a sacred land blessed by saints and seekers, lived a devotee named Changadeva. Though the world regarded him as a sage, he himself was ever humble, considering himself dull and unworthy. But by the infinite mercy of the Lord—He who is the master of all the humble—even the dumb can speak words of wisdom, and the lame can cross mountains. That mercy transforms rough stones into touchstones, poison into nectar, and hearts once cruel into vessels of divine longing.

Changadeva was no exception. Though he felt himself to be bereft of learning, by the grace of Śrīpati, the Lord of Lakṣmī, he was inspired to speak of the deepest truths. He became a beacon of devotion in his region, and his earlier life—filled with mystical powers and yogic fame—now gave way to the pure path of bhakti.

In a previous vision, Changadeva had visited the holy land of Paṇḍharpur, where Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga, accompanied by His consort Rukmiṇī, appeared before him. Rukmiṇī Devī, pleased with his sincerity, had given him the Ṣaḍakṣarī mantra, a sacred six-syllable name of the Lord. Receiving this priceless jewel, Changadeva returned to his home, his heart now entirely devoted to Pāṇḍuraṅga.

From that moment onward, his life was transformed. Whether awake, asleep, or in dreams, he remained absorbed in thoughts of the Lord. He spent his days in hearing and chanting the holy names, listening to sacred teachings, and leading kīrtanas that stirred the hearts of all who heard. Like bees drawn to nectar or birds to ripened grain, people began to gather around him—not out of curiosity, but out of love. Their souls, thirsty for divine association, found shelter in his presence.

One day, while immersed in the meditation, a most wondrous event took place. As he sat in quiet meditation, Changadeva suddenly found himself transported to Paṇḍharpur once again. And there, right before his eyes, stood the Supreme Lord Himself—dark as a raincloud, glowing with divine brilliance, bearing the conch and disc. His eyes were full of compassion, His yellow garments shimmered like lightning, and earrings shaped like makaras dangled from His ears. The anklets on His lotus feet chimed gently as He moved, and His entire form radiated bliss.

Overcome with emotion, Changadeva offered full ceremonial worship—the sixteen upacāras—with intense devotion. Then, Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga spoke tenderly: “O noble devotee, now go and reside on the banks of the sacred Godāvarī. There, you shall continue your worship.”

Hearing this divine instruction, Changadeva bowed and humbly asked, “O Infallible One, how shall I worship You? In what form shall my love find its home?”

The Lord smiled, and at that moment, His divine form manifested within a śālagrāma śilā—a sacred black stone worshipped by Vaiṣṇavas as the direct representation of Nārāyaṇa. Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga said, “This is My form. I now reside within this śilā. Worship Me here, and I shall never leave you.”

With those words, the Lord vanished from external sight—but He remained forever present within the śālagrāma, and more so, within the very heart of His devotee.

As Changadeva prepared to follow the Lord’s instruction and depart for the Godāvarī, the villagers, moved by love and devotion, approached him. “Please do not leave us behind,” they implored. “If you go, who will guide us in this world of illusion? We too wish to live near the Godāvarī, to stay with you and continue our spiritual journey.”

Their sincere plea touched Changadeva’s heart. He embraced their longing and said, “If your hearts are pure, then all your desires shall be fulfilled here.” He then established a sacred stone at that spot, declaring that anyone who made a vow there with true devotion would see it fulfilled. Indeed, from that day onward, many miraculous fulfillments took place, and the place became renowned as a sacred site of divine blessings.

Content that his followers were cared for, Changadeva now prepared to journey to his destined abode. He took with him the śālagrāma containing the Lord’s personal presence, and his family. As he departed, people of all ages gathered to see him off. Tears flowed freely—men and women wept aloud, their hearts heavy with the pain of separation.

“Our master is leaving us,” they cried. “How unfortunate we are now. But blessed indeed are those who will now live by the Godāvarī, for they shall dwell in his presence.”

The atmosphere was charged with grief and devotion, much like the sorrow felt in Gokula when Kṛṣṇa departed for Mathurā. The villagers’ hearts, once warmed by the presence of their saint, now trembled in longing. Yet, a deeper truth remained.

The Lord and His devotee are never truly separate. Just as the sun and its rays, the flower and its fragrance, or gold and its natural shine are one in essence yet distinct, so too are the Supreme Lord and His bhakta. This is the inconceivable, simultaneous oneness and difference—acintya-bhedābheda-tattva—glorified by the Vaiṣṇavas. The Lord eternally resides within His devotee, and the devotee is a perfect vessel for the Lord’s love.

With the deity of Lord Keśava lovingly nestled in his hands and the Holy Name on his tongue, the great saint Changadeva began his sacred journey. His every step was absorbed in remembrance of Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga, the beloved Lord of Rukmiṇī, whose mercy had transformed his heart and mission.

Traveling with his family, he soon arrived at the hallowed place known as Puṇyastambha. As the flowing waters of the sacred Godāvarī River came into view, his heart overflowed with reverence. He immediately bowed in full prostration, recognizing the divine presence that pervaded her waves. This was no ordinary river—it was the manifest form of compassion itself, known to cleanse even the gravest of sins and liberate souls from countless lifetimes of bondage.

Entering the water with deep humility, Changadeva prayed, "O Mother Godāvarī, I am weary of this endless cycle of birth and death. May your merciful glance purify me and carry me beyond the darkness of material existence." Though his words expressed a longing for mokṣa, his heart yearned not for impersonal liberation but for eternal service to the lotus feet of his Lord.

He remembered that even Lord Viṣṇu Himself had appeared near these sacred waters, and thus, with proper honor, he offered prayers to Lord Śiva, the great devotee of the Lord, who had once been pleased at this very place by the great sage Gautama. Here, Śaṅkara had descended to uplift suffering souls, empowered by the Lord's grace.

Changadeva knew well: merely beholding the Godāvarī could destroy sins accumulated over a hundred births, and bathing in her purifying waters was like cleansing oneself through a thousand lifetimes. With folded hands and tears in his eyes, he pleaded, "O divine river, you are the Mother of all. Please guide me to the feet of my eternal master—Keśava."

Having completed his bath with deep inner surrender, he resolved to begin a life of regular worship. Daily he would bathe at Somatīrtha, have darśana of Lord Rāmeśvara, and offer full pūjā with sixteen types of devotional offerings. Thousands of bilva leaves were placed at the feet of Chandra-mouli Śiva, not as a form of independent worship, but as an offering to the Lord's dear servant. Then, seated among Vaiṣṇavas, he immersed himself in hari-kīrtana.

Following his cooking, Changadeva would perform the panca-mahāyajnas, the five sacred sacrifices. He arranged seats for brāhmaṇas and sannyāsīs, personally serving them sanctified meals with love and humility.

With blessings from Pāṇḍuraṅga ever present in his heart, Changadeva established a maṭha near the riverbank. There, he installed a beautiful deity of Śrī Keśavarāja, lovingly summoning qualified brāhmaṇas to conduct the abhiṣeka ceremony. The śilā was bathed with pancāmṛta, milk, curd, honey, ghee, and sugar, just as one would welcome the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha into one's home.

The Lord's form was adorned with brilliant garments, jewels, and fragrant sandalwood paste. Flowers, incense, and ghee lamps filled the temple, and a grand mahānaivedya was offered with exquisite sweets. Betel leaves and gold coins were humbly placed before the deity, and the entire assembly joined Changadeva in joyful circumambulation.

Then, bowing low with folded hands, Changadeva cried out, “O Lord Keśava! I am helpless, fallen, and undeserving. Still, I take shelter of You alone. Please accept my devotion and make this place Your eternal dwelling.”

The deity was installed on an auspicious day with great celebration. Brāhmaṇas were honored with rich offerings and fed sumptuous meals. Word of Changadeva’s divine service and miracles spread rapidly across the land. People came from far and wide—poor and wealthy, seekers and kings—drawn by the scent of bhakti and the hope of receiving the Lord’s mercy through the saint’s touch.

In earlier days, Changadeva had been a devotee of Śiva and had even composed an abhanga titled “Chāṅgā Vaṭeśvara.” Yet now, he had fully taken shelter of Keśava, and by the Godāvarī’s bank at Puṇyastambha, he became known as Keśavadāsa—the humble servant of Lord Keśava. His songs and spiritual poetry poured forth like nectar, inspired by the Ṣaḍakṣarī mantra gifted to him by Rukmiṇī’s Lord. Constantly chanting, he received divine vision and deeper realizations.

Villagers and pilgrims exclaimed, “That great Vaṭeśvara, once veiled in yogic mysticism, has now become the Lord’s surrendered devotee—graced by Rukmiṇī-Pāṇḍuraṅga Himself!”

Even King Rāmarāja of Devagiri heard of these marvels. Moved by devotion, he came in person to meet Changadeva. Bowing low before the saint, he offered praises and humbly requested, “Please show me a divine miracle with my own eyes.” With gentle affection, Changadeva said, “Bring your soldiers and followers. The Lord shall reveal His power.”

As the king arranged for a feast, a miracle unfolded. Before even the cooking began, plates were set out. And instantly, hot, fresh meals of six distinct flavors appeared on every plate—each exactly suited to the eater’s desire. Thousands were fed, and all were fully satisfied. Afterward, betel leaves and thirteen varieties of spices were distributed. The king, astounded, spoke in awe: “This must be the work of the Lord Himself. Surely, you are His empowered representative—descended to uplift the world.”

The king folded his hands and made a heartfelt request: “Please stay here at Puṇyastambha. Bless this sacred forest with your presence.” Changadeva agreed, and with his family, he took residence near Somatīrtha, where he continued his daily worship and devotional service.

As the years passed, he remained absorbed in divine remembrance. For twelve years, he lived in Puṇyastambha, keeping a sacred vow to visit Paṇḍharpur during the holy months of Āṣāḍhī and Kārtikī, never missing his beloved Lord’s festival.

One day, sensing his time was near, Changadeva gathered the saints and said, “Now I shall enter into samādhi.” Understanding the gravity of his words, the Vaiṣṇavas lovingly made preparations. Brāhmaṇas were honored, kīrtanas resounded, and flags and banners filled the sky. A great dindī procession was held, echoing with the names of Govinda, Keśava, and Pāṇḍuraṅga.

Seated on a divine seat, the yogi saint received offerings and darśana from countless pilgrims. Then, with complete serenity, he entered deep samādhi, surrounded by devotees singing the holy name. Even as the saint sat absorbed in transcendental meditation, the Lord's mercy continued to flow. And so, dear listener, prepare yourself—for the next miracle was about to begin.

In the later years of his radiant life, the great yogī and Vaiṣṇava saint, Śrī Changadeva, had taken shelter at Puṇyastambha, a holy site near the banks of the sacred Godāvarī River. Here, he established his maṭha, performed worship to Lord Keśava with deep devotion, and gave refuge to many seekers of truth.

One day, a pious woman named Śrīmatī Sonāī came to see the saint. Her face was clouded with sorrow, and tears glistened in her eyes. Seeing the saint's compassionate gaze, she shared her tale of grief.

"Bābā," she said, "we once lived peacefully in Kalyāṇ-Kalburgā. But fate struck hard—my only son died young, leaving behind his wife but no child. Our family line was cut off, and all joy departed from our home."

Sonāī and her daughter-in-law, devastated and weary, had left their town and wandered in search of peace. For a while they stayed at the abode of Goddess Jogāī, hoping to find solace in the Devi's shelter. But even there, the mind remained restless. Urged by fate, they resolved to go on a pilgrimage, carrying the ashes of the deceased son with them, their hearts set on offering them at Gayā according to sacred tradition.

As they journeyed, they halted for three days near the Godāvarī. It was there that Sonāī heard the glories of Śrī Changadeva Yogī, the saint who had performed countless miracles by the mercy of the Lord. With reverence, she came for his darśana, while the daughter-in-law stayed behind.

As soon as she bowed before the saint, a divine utterance emerged from his lips: "You shall beget a son."

Startled, Sonāī cried, "But how can that be? My daughter-in-law is a widow! How can she bear a child?" Her voice trembled with disbelief and pain.

But the yogī's words were not of worldly origin. With firm compassion, he replied: "I do not speak falsely. By the will of the Lord, this shall happen. The promise I utter is protected by Bhagavān Himself."

He turned his heart toward Lord Viṭṭhala, the beloved of Śrī Rukmiṇī Devī, and prayed, "O merciful Lord of Paṇḍharpur, may Your devotee's word never go in vain. Please manifest Your divine will and uphold the dignity of Your bhakta."

He then instructed Sonāī to bring the ashes of her son. What followed was a divine līlā, beyond the understanding of ordinary mortals.

Gathering wise brāhmaṇas and sacred residents of the place, he announced with solemn authority, “This soul shall be reborn—not by karma, nor by desire—but by the Lord's causeless mercy.”

With pure intent, he sanctified the ashes in holy water and recited the Saṁjīvanī mantra, not as a yogic spell, but as a humble prayer to the Supreme Lord, the source of all life. Then, with sacred resolve, he gave this water to the daughter-in-law to drink.

By the unseen will of Lord Viṭṭhala, a miracle unfolded. In that very moment, life was infused. The daughter-in-law’s sorrow-stricken face began to glow. Her appearance changed, and she no longer looked like one bereft of joy, but as one carrying the hope of a new dawn.

Yet, the world being what it is, whispers began among the so-called learned.

“How can this be? A widow now bearing a child?” Some accused the saint of using spells or dark arts. Others slandered him with cruel words, their hearts blinded by caste pride and shallow tradition.

But Śrī Changadeva, like a lion unmoved by the barking of jackals, remained silent. He knew that only time and the Lord's will would reveal the truth. He declared, “Let the child be born first. Then I shall return to samādhi. Until then, I shall stay and protect the dignity of this miracle.”

Though Vaiṣṇavas are beyond birth and death, they accept worldly roles only to awaken the faith of others.

Nine months passed, and by the grace of Lord Viṭṭhala, the young widow gave birth to a radiant baby boy. The whole town rejoiced! The saint’s words had come true.

A grand celebration took place. Brāhmaṇas were honored with gifts and food, and on the twelfth day, the child was named “Viṭṭhala”, after the Lord who had bestowed this divine blessing. The young mother, once cloaked in grief, now radiated peace and joy.

Śrī Changadeva kept the widow under his care at his maṭha, guarding her with purity and dignity. When the boy turned five, preparations began for his upanayana saṁskāra, the sacred thread ceremony. But once again, worldly pride reared its head. None of the brāhmaṇas stepped forward to officiate.

Changadeva, perceiving their inner prejudice, said: “Let us go to Paṇḍharpur. There, the Lord of the yādavas will perform the ceremony Himself if no one else will.”

With kīrtana, clapping of karatālas, and joyous mṛdaṅga beats, the saint led a grand procession to the holy kṣetra. After bathing in the Candrabhāgā, they took darśana of Puṇḍalīka’s samādhi and entered the sacred temple of Viṭṭhala.

Before Garuḍa-stambha, Changadeva fell prostrate and wept in surrender. Then, raising his eyes, he beheld the Lord of his heart—Viṭṭhala, dark like a raincloud, standing gloriously on His brick, adorned with a yellow dhotī, vaijayantī-mālā, and a dazzling crown.

Lost in bhakti, the yogī bowed and forgot the world. The Lord, Bhakta-vatsala, the lover of His devotees, then asked: "Tell Me, O My dear Changadeva, how are you?"

The saint replied with folded hands, "By Your mercy alone, all is well!"

The great saint Chāṅgadev stood, carrying a child not born of earthly union, but of divine grace. He gently laid this radiant infant at the lotus feet of Lord Viṭhobā and offered his soul in prayer: "O Lord, may Your mercy forever protect him. O beloved of Rukmiṇī, You must now bless this child!"

At once, the sanctum echoed not only with divine presence but also with the melodious voice of Goddess Rukmiṇī Herself, who smiled upon the saint's steadfast bhakti and declared: "Because of your unwavering faith in Śrīhari, you shall now experience domestic joy—sons and grandsons—without reproach or shame. The Lord's blessing shall shield you from slander."

Then Viṭhobā, the dark Lord of the brick, ocean of mercy, revealed His compassionate heart: "For the sake of My devotees' vows, I bring My word to life. In every yuga I have come to uphold their truth. As Matsya and Varāha, I rescued the helpless. For Prahlāda, I emerged from a pillar as Narasiṁha. To honor My father's command, I became Paraśurāma and cleansed the earth of the unrighteous twenty-one times. As Rāma, I slew Rāvaṇa and enthroned Vibhīṣaṇa. As Kṛṣṇa, I tended Nanda's cows and upheld dharma for the Pāṇḍavas. Drawn by Puṇḍalīk's devotion, I descended to this very brick upon which I now stand."

Viṭhobā's voice deepened with warmth as He continued: "I appeared in a broken shrine for Nāmdev the tailor, walked upon a wall for Jnāndev's word, and Chāṅgadev, you know these tales well. Just as I fulfilled My vows before, so too shall I protect this miraculous child. Fear not—I, the protector of the meek, shall uphold your word."

Hearing this, Chāṅgadev was overwhelmed. Tears of gratitude streamed from his eyes as he bowed in full prostration, his heart filled with divine joy. Then, rising from the sanctum, he returned to the dry plains where devotees sang and danced in ceaseless kīrtan. At dawn, all bathed in the sacred Chandrabhāgā, hearts serene in the Lord's grace.

With quiet resolve, Chāṅgadev summoned the learned Brahmins and said gently, "We gave this widow the blessing of a son. Now that he is born by divine will, I ask you, revered ones, to perform his thread ceremony and honor our sacred vow."

But the Brahmins were incensed.

“A child from a widow?” they cried. “Impossible! This is an affront to all śāstric tradition. We shall not partake in such heresy!”

They departed in anger, leaving the vow unfulfilled.

Some among them muttered darkly, “Surely, she conceived in sin.” Others, more contemplative, whispered, “Perhaps this is the miracle of a saint.” A few, their hearts softened, mused, “Chāṅgadev is a true yogi. This boy may be a being of dharma.” Yet many refused to see past their caste pride, and the widow wept silently as Chāṅgadev stood, heart heavy but unwavering.

With gentle compassion, Chāṅgadev consoled her: “Fear not. So long as Rukmiṇī’s Lord watches over us, you shall see not just this son, but grandchildren too, and live with dignity, untouched by slander.”

Then he made a bold declaration: “Let us prepare a grand feast for a hundred Brahmins. Today, the Lord Himself shall dine with us!”

With steady faith, he entered the sanctum once more and offered his prayer: “O Jagannātha! Today, You must come to this humble hut on the dry plains. Shower Your mercy on this boy You Yourself have given. Prove to all that Your devotee’s word is never false.”

Viṭhobā, delighted by this unwavering devotion, smiled and answered, “Yes, I shall come.”

The widow, joyful yet trembling, began preparing a sumptuous feast, her every movement infused with reverence. But cruel tongues were never far. Villagers mocked: “A widow bearing a child? And now she claims the Lord will eat from her hands?” Their scorn pierced her soul, and she turned inward in silent prayer: “O Sadguru, protect my honor. O Lord, please come.”

Just then, Keshavdās, Chāṅgadev’s devoted disciple, arrived and exclaimed with urgency, “Quick! Prepare the offerings! The Lord is on His way!”

True to his word, Viṭhobā had left His sanctum in the temple. The deity was missing. Devotees arriving for morning darśan were astonished to find the sanctum empty. Rumors spread like wildfire: “Has the Lord vanished?” some gasped. “Did Chāṅgadev take Him away?” wondered others.

Even the skeptical villagers, drawn by the divine pull, came to see—and indeed, the temple felt lifeless, a hollow shell without its Lord.

As once the devotion of Puṇḍalīk brought Viṭhobā from Vaikuṇṭha, now Chāṅgadev’s bhakti had drawn Him to the dusty plains.

The Brahmins, panicked and bewildered, rushed to Chāṅgadev. “What have you done? Where is the Lord?”

With serene dignity, Chāṅgadev replied, “You cast out the widow and rejected the boy. But now the Lord has come to her door, to dine with His devotee and fulfill His vow.”

They argued, “We see no Lord. If He is here, let Him reveal Himself!”

Chāṅgadev answered softly, “Without devotion, even the Supreme remains unseen. But I assure you—He is here.”

The Brahmins wavered in doubt and finally challenged, “If He is truly here, then let there be food enough for all—prove it!”

Chāṅgadev smiled. “Go bathe in the river. Upon your return, your doubts shall be washed away as well.”

And so the villagers, the Brahmins, the skeptics, and the faithful went to purify themselves in the Chandrabhāgā.

When they returned, thousands had gathered. Two thousand plates were already laid out, and still the feast grew. People of every caste came, drawn by a divine scent and sacred joy in the air.

The Brahmins, bewildered, whispered among themselves, “This feast is endless. Where does the food come from?”

The Lord’s presence was everywhere—in the fragrance, the taste, the still air between breaths, in the silence between chants. The miraculous son cooed gently on his mother’s lap, his eyes radiant, his very being a testimony to divine grace.

And there, amidst all, sat Viṭhobā Himself—unseen to the proud, visible to the pure-hearted.

The vow was fulfilled. The widow was honored. The boy, born of faith, became a symbol of Viṭṭhala’s eternal promise.

The villagers praised Chāṅgadeva: “In his yajna of devotion, the Supreme Brahman has manifested in full! No one left unsatisfied, no one remained hungry—what a divine act!”

The brāhmaṇas humorously remarked: “From today, he shall be known as ‘Bhātlavaṇḍyā’ (the one who fed rice)—for he truly became the feeder of all!”

When the sacred thread ceremony concluded, the child stood radiant, transformed. Chāṅgadeva placed his hands upon him, saying: “This is my blessed son!”

Brāhmaṇas were given gifts and offerings with great generosity. As they entered the temple for darśana, they saw the divine mūrti of Lord Viṭṭhala, standing in manifest form. They bowed with tears, saying: “O Rukmiṇīpati, today we dined at Your table. It was You who came disguised, moved by the widow’s pure love.”

All the pilgrims and sadhus present bowed at the feet of Chāṅgadeva, crying: “O Vaiṣṇava hero, you have revealed an astonishing miracle!”

The next morning, the community gathered again around Chāṅgadeva. The auspicious time for the sacred thread ceremony had passed, but another event was to unfold. A noble householder stepped forward and said: “O revered one, I wish to offer my daughter in marriage to your blessed son. Please grant us this honor.”

Chāṅgadeva agreed, and both families prepared with love and joy. The wedding was held with full Vedic rites—festive music, chanting of mantras, auspicious vows, and rich decorations adorned the bride and groom. The celebration lasted four full days.

When it was time for Chāṅgadeva to leave for Dvārakā, the widow came forward with folded hands and tears. She placed her son at his feet and prayed: “O saint! Let no deity but Viṭṭhala be worshipped by him or his descendants. Let Viṭṭhala alone be our family’s eternal Lord!”

Chāṅgadeva smiled and blessed her: “So be it. No one in this lineage shall worship another. To do so would invite misfortune.”

And so, in that blessed family, every year during Kārtika month, the descendants would travel to Paṇḍharpur, serve rice to the brāhmaṇas, and continue the sacred vow of devotion.

With heartfelt farewells, Chāṅgadeva departed. Men and women bowed in gratitude, their hearts overflowing with joy. He returned to his āśrama with his community of disciples, leaving behind a legacy of faith, love, and divine transformation.

Thus ends this divine episode of Bhaktalīlāmṛta, the fragrant grove of Tulasī-leaves, where the Supreme Lord, Rukmiṇī’s beloved, dwells forever in the hearts of His devotees.

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Chapter 8

Obeisance unto Śrī Gaṇeśa

All glory, all victory to Thee, O infinite Giver of auspiciousness, O Supreme Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, O Master of the universe and preceptor of all the worlds! Thou art the Friend of the lowly, the Protector of the forsaken, the Giver of bliss — Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga! O Viṭhobā, the Eternal, who is both the inert and the conscious in Thy mysterious play, Thou hast, without being asked, graciously uplifted countless bound souls. Why then should I harbour any personal anxiety? Only hold my remembrance steadfast in Thy heart. Thou hast gathered and destroyed all my sins, yet I remain a mere idol of clay. O Purifier of the fallen, Lover of Thy devotees, let this humble submission reach Thee.

Though I was born in this world, O Śrī Hari, I have performed deeds of sin in endless variety. I know within myself, as a witness in my own heart, that I am drowning in the ocean of worldly existence. My store of past, present, and future karma — whether fixed, accumulated, or being newly formed — gives no sign of ending. Therefore, I look to Thy compassion alone, and with pure love I plead for Thee. Drawn away by countless imaginings, the worldly soul is never content. Whether waking, sleeping, or dreaming, the mind never finds stillness. If Thou, O Śrī Hari, dost shower Thy grace, only then can the soul cross this ocean of birth and death. All other remedies, though tried in many ways, cannot bear fruit.

It is as if a seed were sown in fertile ground, but no rain ever fell upon it — so is all effort fruitless without Thy mercy. Whomsoever Thou, O Husband of Rukmiṇī, dost accept into Thy care, that soul abides in natural steadfastness. His fame becomes known far and wide, and ancient songs resound with his praise. It is fitting to recall in detail the holy lives of such saints, to behold them with the mind's inner lotus. I am unworthy, impure, and of feeble understanding — merely an occasion for their mercy to manifest.

In the previous chapter, it was told how, after dining upon the humble rice served before him, Śrī Cāṅgadeva celebrated the marriage of the blessed son Varada and then departed from there. Many thoughts arose in his heart, and with firm resolve he desired to proceed at once to Dvārakā, to bathe in the sacred waters of the Gomati and behold the deity of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Thus spoke the Yogīśvara, and with him a great pilgrimage party set forth. Everywhere the greatness of holy company was spoken of and praised.

Now there was in the town of Dhārur a learned brāhmaṇa named Yādavapaṇṭh. In the company of Śrī Cāṅgadeva, he too set out upon the pilgrimage. At that very time his wife was with child. She could not remain at home, for in her heart she had firmly resolved that she would not be separated from her husband. Many, in various ways, sought to dissuade her, but she was unmoved.

They said, “If you go in Cāṅgadeva’s company, Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself will surely protect you.” With such faith she set her mind and departed with her husband. Yet some in the family were doubtful. The wife’s brother-in-law, Devapisa, pondered uneasily what trials might lie ahead on such a long journey.

“She is in a delicate state,” some said. “She has never before walked so far, and Dvārakā is distant indeed.” Others observed, “Her pregnancy is already six months gone — she has no strength for such walking.” Some relatives, concerned for her, came hurrying to fetch her back. They tried in many ways to entangle her in worldly affection, but her mind was wholly set upon the dark-hued Lord.

“If my husband goes first to the Lord’s abode, and I remain behind, what will be my lot? If suddenly he renounces the world, where then will my shelter be? A brāhmaṇa birth is hard to obtain — how then should I waste it in household attachment?”

Hearing her earnest resolve, her elders accepted her decision. In Cāṅgadeva’s company, Yādavapaṇṭh set off swiftly, while his wife followed more slowly along the road. Some old women, feeble of limb, came behind; Yādavapaṇṭh’s wife walked quickly, keeping pace with them. As the sun was setting and the travellers halted for the night, she pressed on until she reached her husband’s resting place. But he said, “Why have you come here? This will bring me trouble — you should return at once.”

Yet when she tried to obey and turn back, her heart broke. She wept, and fellow pilgrims counselled her, “Do not forsake his company.”

Entrusting herself utterly to Cāṅgadeva, Yādavapaṇṭh received his blessing and felt content. The false glitter of worldly life faded from his heart; the shadow of Brahman’s peace fell upon him, and his body seemed lifeless to the senses. Whether in waking or in sleep, he beheld the deity of his Guru, Cāṅgadeva. Even in dream and deep sleep, his state was one of effortless union. Such was Yādavapaṇṭh’s condition — all delusion about worldly life vanished, and the thought “has my wife come or not?” no longer arose in his mind.

He beheld all creatures of every kind as pervaded by the one Self, and he too was merged in that oneness, without even the notion of duality. Thus singing and dancing in love, the pilgrims advanced along the path to Dvārakā, while behind them came his wife, walking slowly in her condition. By then nine months had passed. There was no mother, sister, or helper beside her, and the wilderness lay bare and empty.

Cāṅgadeva, the great yogī, with his followers, had gone far ahead. Yādavapaṇṭh too went forward without looking back. Alone, without a soul in sight, she sank down in the forest, unable to walk further for the pains in her womb.

“My parents are far away, my husband has left me — this plight is grievous. O Śrī Hari, what shall I do now?” she lamented. The pangs of childbirth grew stronger, and the pilgrimage party was far ahead. No man was near, and she could see no course of action. Sensing her

distress, she then sent her heart's cry rushing to Cāṅgadeva: "O revered Guru, merciful incarnation, come and give peace to my soul!"

Fourteen full years, O Master, didst Thou overcome the unconquerable Time. To the widowed queen Thou gavest the son Varada, and this fame of Thine I have indeed heard. Therefore, I tell Thee openly that I had set out for Dvārakā with a fixed resolve. My husband, being in a disembodied state of absorption, left me behind in the wilderness. I, a stranger in a foreign place and burdened with an unborn child, knew not how to meet the hour of labour. With no mother or sister beside me, I was filled with restless anguish. O Lover of Thy devotees, O Bestower of liberation, may Thou at least come to me in this hour of need! Thus did my desperate cry go forth — and those words fell upon the very ears of the Lord.

The Friend of the forsaken, the Ocean of compassion, the Lover of His devotees, the Sea of mercy — to protect His bhaktas He takes on countless incarnations: "He has come as the Fish, the Tortoise, the Boar; as Narasiṃha, the Dwarf, Paraśurāma complete; as Śrī Rāma, son of Daśaratha; as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, as Buddha, and as Kalki yet to come. For one devotee He has carried a wall upon His head; for another, He has sat and eaten from a stone deity; for yet another, He has appeared as a cowherd among the paddy fields. At one home He became Kṛṣṇa of the sandalwood hue, joyfully drawing water; for the maid Jani, He ground grain without a trace of hesitation. With the milkmaid Choḳhā, He and Rukmiṇī's Lord bore the yoke of cattle on His own shoulders; when tied to the mortar by a cowherdess, the wielder of the Śārṅga bow endured it gladly. For His servant Sena, He accepted the humble duty of a village barber. Whenever His devotees fell into dire calamities, He would rise at once to deliver them. Never does He consider time or place — the Merciful Lord takes form for the sake of the lowly."

Thus, when the cry from a woman in travail reached His ears, He heard it instantly. At once the world's Life itself grew restless, unable to hold back in compassion. Yādavapaṇṭh, too, felt his heart melt in wonder at what was to come. Then, before the wife of Yādavapaṇṭh, there appeared the Lord of the Serpent couch. Yet He took on the form of a young woman of surpassing beauty. He was clad in a fine, white, delicate bodice, a garland of forest flowers resting upon His chest. In His ears gleamed golden ornaments, and bright vermilion adorned His brow. He who dwells in Vaikuṇṭha with Lakṣmī upon His breast, He who holds the bow Pināka in His heart — how marvellous, I thought, that He now stands here like a simple village maiden! Seeing this radiant form, the expectant mother was struck with wonder. "O friend," she said, "from where hast thou come? Tell me truly."

Then spoke the Lord, reclined upon Śeṣa in His own abode: "Cāṅgadeva has sent me to thee. My name is Kṛṣṇābāī. Knowing thy hour of birth was upon thee, I have hastened here. Fear not in thy heart — I shall tend to all thy needs."

So speaking, the Husband of Rukmiṇī recalled His yogamāyā. By His will He created there a fair and wondrous dwelling. Taking her gently by the hand, He led her into that temple-like abode. "Tell me," He said, "all that troubles thy heart. Hide nothing within."

“Alone in a foreign land, with no mother or sister by my side,” she replied, “the hour of birth drew near — and at once Thou camest, knowing my plight.”

Hearing this, Kṛṣṇābāī brought joy to her heart. “I wish to repay Thee somehow,” she said, “yet I have nothing to offer Thee.”

Saying thus, she bowed her head at His feet. Soon, the appointed hour arrived, and a son of auspicious form was born.

The dark-hued Lord was filled with delight. Beating a ceremonial plate with His own hands, He rejoiced at fulfilling the wish of His servant — for in His play, the Cowherd knows no weariness. He whose deity the three-eyed Lord Śiva worships in the secret altar of his heart — that very Lord, with His own hands, cut the umbilical cord, holding the newborn in joy upon His lap.

Krishnabai, in the tender days of her confinement, spoke softly, “O childbearing mother, why do you toil alone in such hardship? Have you not engaged another midwife for your aid?” To this, she gave her gentle reply, “My heart is satisfied with what has already been done for me. I feel no weariness from the labors of this time—this is my firm conviction.”

For the One from whose sacred toe the pure and holy Ganga herself issued forth, He bathed the newborn mother with that life-giving water. Out of His own loving will, He distributed sweet rice cakes to every household and, with promptness, provided various medicines in manifold ways, the very Soul of the universe serving with His own hands.

When the hearth fire was kindled, Krishnabai would place her own body in service—preparing wholesome food with delicate care, feeding the mother with affection. She would herself prepare betel leaves and offer them to the queenly Rukmini’s hands, light the lamps that burned day and night, and sit awake beside the convalescent, ever watchful.

The Lord, whom all the hosts of heaven worship with offerings and incense, gathered with His own hands all the materials for worship—betel-nut, vermilion, fragrant flowers of many kinds, and fresh garlands—and placed them neatly upon the worship-board. In this manner, He worshipped her ceaselessly, remaining awake in vigil throughout the nights, and on the tenth day bathed her with His own hands, the Eternal Consort of the goddess Himself.

Thus, for an entire month, the Life of the world served the mother in her recovery, never once feeling weariness, tender-hearted and gracious Shri Krishna attending to her every need. Whatever she desired, He fulfilled completely; medicines and nourishing food were prepared with loving care, and He would personally seat her for the meal, delighting in the act of serving.

When Yadav, her husband, departed with noble companions, leaving his wife in the village, it was the merciful Shri Ranga who took personal charge of her. Yet at that time, none knew

of this divine service; for the unfathomable play of Shri Hari is such that even Brahma himself cannot fully comprehend it.

At the close of the month, Changadeva journeyed to Dwaraka. After bathing upon the banks of the Gomati, he entered the temple, offering prostrations at the great entrance, his heart filled with love. Then, bringing the form of Shri Krishna with Rukmini to mind, he gazed—but lo! The deity of the Lord was not there. In wonder, he searched the universe and beheld the Supreme Yogi engaged in a marvelous act: The wife of Yadav, far away in Mahi, had come to her time of delivery. Instantly, Indiravara—the Lord Himself—had gone there, taking on the very form of Krishnabai, and was personally attending to her confinement. In deep meditation, Changadeva beheld this entire episode clearly.

Rukmini, seeing this vision, addressed the Lord of Dwaraka with tender reproach: "O servant of your devotees, why did You abandon me to go and serve in childbirth? An entire month has passed without the sight of the Serpent-bed Lord. While You became Krishnabai, we have languished here in longing. Day and night the eight mystic powers stand ready at my side, and had You commanded, they could have accomplished such a task. How is it that, having such majesty, You would personally serve in this manner? This befits not the glory of the Lord."

Hearing her words, the Lord replied with a smile, "O mother, what then should I say? It is my nature to perform the works of My devotees with My own body. Have you not known from the earlier episodes that I, the Serpent-bed Lord, would clean even the remnants left in the homes of the pious? The Yadav army of fifty-six crores stands ever ready for service, yet I have groomed the horses of Arjuna with my own hands. The great sages perform sacrifices with pure intent, yet I partake of the remnants of the cowherds with heartfelt love. To the Brahma-knowledgeable ascetics who never hold Me in mind, I allow Myself to be bound by the cowherd women with playful ropes. Though the eight mystic powers stand as My maidservants, I tell them nothing, choosing instead to grind grain in the homes of My devotees, enchanted by their love. In this very manner did the Life of the world attend to childbirth for a month—it is simply the nature of My being. What remedy can there be for it?"

Hearing these words, Changadeva's heart was filled with devotion, and Rukmini's mind was filled with wonder. She said, "Now I know how to bring the Lord of Vaikuntha back. I shall go myself to that riverbank and, in gentle manner, persuade Shri Hari—now dwelling as Krishnabai—to return here."

Agreeing to her plan, Changadeva bowed to the Mother of the universe and quickly set forth. At the banks of the Mahi, he beheld the Lord of Yogis and saw with his own eyes the new and wondrous abode that the Lord had made there. Amazed, he thought, "Such are the inconceivable plays of Shri Hari, showing many wondrous deeds to the eyes of His devotees."

Upon inquiring among the people as to the whereabouts of Krishnabai, they pointed from afar to the temple. Following their direction, he entered that dwelling.

In the courtyard stood Krishna's consort, and Changadev, beholding her with delight, bowed in reverence. For the Lord, the playful master of Māyā, had taken on a gentle, womanly form, concealing His divinity, and thus offered Himself to be seen. Changadev was a noble yogi who had conquered the cycle of time for fourteen hundred years, yet the wondrous sport of Shri Hari was still veiled from him. How could the eyes of one bound by the senses behold the supreme mystery?

The Lord appears openly upon the earth, taking on manifold forms and guises, yet the covering veil of Māyā falls upon the eyes, and thus Shri Pati remains unseen. Even to others who have shared His company—when He was born in the womb of Yashoda—He revealed the universal form; yet still, as a child, He was called "my little one" by her.

It was in such a time that Changadev beheld Krishna's consort, but in his heart there lingered a shadow of doubt. Was she indeed who she seemed? And so he did not bow in homage. At that very instant, the Lord of Krishna's form, the playful master of Māyā, vanished from that place. Changadev entered the temple, and there he saw a woman, recently delivered, rising to her feet.

She came forward and placed her newborn child at the feet of the yogi, narrating with detail the tale from its beginning to its end. "My husband departed, leaving me alone in this wilderness. I was by myself in this place when the hour of childbirth came, and no one was at hand to aid me. At that moment, out of mercy, my Lady sent here Krishna's consort, who tended to me through the pangs of birth and preserved me from all harm."

Changadev asked eagerly, "Where is Krishna's consort? Show her to me." But the woman replied, "Just as you were coming to the temple, she was standing outside. She has only now gone away in haste." Then Changadev understood within himself, "The Lord Himself has borne the toil for my sake. If I had not brought Yadav with me, would Shri Hari have taken upon Himself the service of childbirth for another's sake?"

He pondered that the Supreme Lord of Dwaraka, for whom great sacrifices, austerities, and disciplines are undertaken, yet humbles Himself to serve His devotee. The woman, joining her palms, placed the infant at his feet, saying, "This is your disciple; keep him in your service always." Hearing her humble words, the Sadguru consented, and with the mother and the child, returned to Dwaraka.

Approaching the royal abode, he beheld the deity of Shri Krishna and addressed Him thus: "O Lord of all gods, consort of Rukmini, how wondrous are Thy ways! Thou hast taken upon Thyself the form of a woman and rendered the service of childbirth. Ocean of compassion, Friend of the forsaken, such a name and nature befit Thee well."

Thus offering his praise, he worshipped the deity of the Lord, performed the auspicious waving of lights, and prostrated himself in love. He then called Yadav in haste and presented to him his wife and son, saying, "Fail not in your duty; this child shall be the root of a great line, from which noble devotees of Hari shall arise to redeem the whole family."

Hearing this, Yadav bowed in devotion, and, hand in hand with his wife, returned home with certainty and peace. Changadev then prepared sweetmeats and served them to the assembly of Vaishnavas. Remaining there for the four months of the holy season, he later took leave for his homeland.

When the time came, he sought the Lord's blessing and, with his companions, departed. With a great company of pilgrims, he came to the banks of the Godavari, and, arriving at the sacred site of Puntambe, met with his dear friends. There he recounted the wondrous tale, and all who heard it were filled with awe.

Word spread that Changadev had been to Dwaraka, and his fame reached distant lands. People said, "This is a divine incarnation upon the earth, born to uplift the world." Such is the glory of a meeting with a true saint—it is like the sun's rays piercing the sky, or the far-off fragrance of champa blossoms borne upon the wind, or the coolness that spreads through the heavens at the rising of the moon in Rohini. Just as the tale of Rama was revealed swiftly, though He had not yet entered the womb of Kausalya, so does the fame of a devotee of God resound upon every tongue. Blessed is the yogi Changadev, who has the Lord Rukmini's consort as his helper.

Having thus come to the Godavari, seven days passed when tidings of a grievous misfortune in Pandharpur were brought. In Bedar there reigned a wicked-minded king, who came swiftly to that holy place and tormented the Brahmins in many ways, bringing great distress upon them. He abolished the Hindu dharma entirely, forbade the Vaishnavas to wear their sacred beads, and punished the gentle Brahmins for singing kirtans and narrating holy tales.

He plundered the sacred town of Pandharpur, leaving behind a Muslim garrison in its place. The temple servants, in fear, concealed the deity of Vithoba in the underground chamber, forbidding anyone to speak His name. If Vaishnavas dared to hold a kirtan, they were punished at once. The great temple of the Lord was broken, and in its place the tyrant built a mosque. The righteous fled at once, beholding the might of the invader.

Such were the tidings, and seven months had passed since the calamity began. Hearing this, Changadev's eyes filled with tears, his body trembled, and his throat was choked with grief. He cried, "O Rukmini's Lord, is it for fear of the age of Kali that Thou art hidden in the darkness below? And what of the boon given to Pundalik, that even the foolish and the sinful would be redeemed by the mere sight of Thee? Shall that now be broken?"

Then he prayed, "O Ocean of Mercy, mighty and steadfast, Thy noble fame is ever in my heart. Didst Thou not conquer Shankhasura, which Shiva, Brahma, Indra, and the gods could not overcome? Didst Thou not take the form of the Fish and vanquish him in an instant?

Didst Thou not once take the form of a Tortoise and bear Mount Mandara upon Thy back, delighting all the gods with the jewels brought forth from the ocean?"

When Hiranyaksha seized the Earth and plunged it deep into the cosmic waters, You, O Lord, swiftly assumed the form of the mighty Boar and, lifting the burden upon Your tusks, restored her to her rightful place. In that very moment, the demon was struck down in but an instant, and thus was the ancient glory of Your deeds proclaimed anew. When Hiranyakashipu, drunk with pride, sought to torment Your steadfast devotee Prahlāda, You revealed Yourself from within the pillar, and with nails as sharp as thunder, tore apart that wicked one, thereby protecting Your servant. When the demon king Bali swelled with the arrogance born of charity and power, You cast him down to the netherworld. O Vanamāli, so mighty and resplendent were You then—yet now, in this age, such power seems hidden.

When the valiant Renukā was oppressed by the thousand-armed Kārtavīrya Arjuna, You, as Paraśurāma, took the axe in hand, single-handedly rid the Earth of unrighteous kings, and established the dominion of the Brāhmaṇas. When deceitful Rāvaṇa imprisoned all the gods, You descended as Rāghava, slew the ten-headed one without delay, and restored freedom to the heavenly hosts. Again, in the womb of Devakī, You took birth as Śrī Hari, destroyed Kaṁsa and Cāṇūra, and brought joy to the Earth. Such was Your splendour in ages past; yet now, it seems all power has vanished. Who, then, shall protect us in this present time? In all the world, no true guardian is seen. In that very moment of calamity, Changadeva spoke within himself: "O Lord of Lords, Bestower of the supreme liberation, come quickly and grant me Your sight. While recounting Your glory, his vision and strength waned. To spare the honour of this age of Kali, You withdrew from sight, concealing Yourself from the terror of the invading Yavanas."

Hearing the plaintive cry of Changadeva, the compassionate consort of Rukmiṇī was moved to pity. Appearing in meditation before him, You raised Your hand in blessing and said: "Beloved devotee, hear My word. I am unshaken, immutable, eternal, and complete. Yet, for the sake of your yearning, I have come. By My own will, I take on countless forms. How, then, could these poor Yavanas cause Me fear? Why, O child, do you grieve? In the ages of Kṛta, Tretā, and Dvāpara, I performed great deeds; but in the Kali age, I have bestowed all My renown upon My devotees. Even if you attempt the impossible, I shall bring it to success. With My help, O foremost among men, let there be no anxiety in your heart. Now, leave the banks of the Godā and go swiftly to the city of Bīdar. There, an extraordinary deed will take place, and all people shall witness it.

Thus speaking, the Lord entered the heart of Changadeva. When Keśavadāsa opened his eyes, his mind was filled with wonder. He said: "To fulfil my longing, I have beheld the very form of Pāṇḍuraṅga. The Lord Himself commands me to proceed to Bīdar.

With the dark-blue Lord upon my head, what obstacle can harm me? The power of Kali has no sway when the compassionate Lord stands as my helper. Just as Śrī Hari overcame the daityas and dānavas, so too must one conquer the six inner foes and, leaving the city of

Death, abide in the city of Vaikuṇṭha. When Rāma slew Rāvaṇa and Kumbhakarṇa, He thereby vanquished lust and anger. Likewise, Śrī Kṛṣṇa destroyed Kaṁsa and Cāṇūra, and in the heart, He overcame pride and envy—thus are the Vaiṣṇava heroes ever victorious, their fame boundless. When Kṛṣṇa slew Śiśupāla, He also uprooted arrogance and conceit within; thus was the ornament of peace established. When Śrī Rāma destroyed Tātikā, He also subdued the spirit of slander. The inner victories of these two are alike, without distinction. Thus, let it be understood that the Lord and His devotee are alike in essence. They delight in each other's company, sharing in love and bliss. Just as the field and the knower of the field are harmoniously one, as the ray and the sun are inseparable, as the ear and the faculty of hearing, or the eye and the faculty of sight, so too are the Lord and the devotee bound in unity. In the same way that the nose and fragrance, or the tongue and taste, are inseparable, so too is there no difference between the Lord and His devotee. Changadeva and the Lord of Rukmiṇī understood each other's hearts. To uplift the inert and the ignorant, the Lord took birth upon the Earth.

In the next chapter, the sweet tale shall unfold, where the Lord fulfils the longings of His devotee. The king among poets shall narrate the charming deeds, and the pure verses shall be sung with joy. Thus ends the eighth chapter of the Bhakta-Līlāmṛta, which grants fulfilment to those who listen with devotion.

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Chapter 9

Glory to Śrī Gopālakṛṣṇa!

Victory, all victory to the World-Teacher, the Lord of Paṇḍharī—Jagadguru Paṇḍari Nātha! He alone is the supreme sovereign of all that moves and does not move. According to each soul's faith and devotion, That infinite Lord fulfills every earnest longing.

Just as one sits beneath the wish-fulfilling tree and imagines their heart's desire—Lo! Without delay or hindrance, that very fruit appears before the eyes.

Like a man, dressed in finery, gazing into a mirror and seeing his own reflection — So too does the Lord reveal Himself in the form the devotee beholds with unwavering thought.

Like an echo arising from the mountains when one cries out in a loud voice—Just as the cliffs return the same sound, the stone temple too gives back the divine response.

In this very manner, O ocean of compassion! To each soul as per their inner feeling, You bestow the fruit of their yearning—You are the savior of the fallen.

Those devoid of devotion cannot see You; To them, You remain unseen, O Śrīpati. But to the pure-hearted bhaktas, You manifest in your transcendental form, tangible and real.

To uplift your devotees, You have taken many forms—Incarnating again and again, slaying wicked asuras and daityas, revealing Your glorious deeds and divine pastimes in countless narratives.

Now, assuming the form of the Buddha, O Hṛṣīkeśa, You speak gently with all beings. Yet, to Your own true devotees, You grant fame and eternal renown.

As told in the earlier episode—the Lord once took the form of Kṛṣṇābāī, and out of divine affection, he Himself served a pilgrim woman during childbirth. Cāṅgadeva beheld this astonishing vision, and was struck with wonder in his heart. Having met the divine husband of that woman, He quickly returned, amazed.

When he arrived near the Puṇya Stambha, he heard the alarming news of Paṇḍharpur: King Avindha had entered the holy land and stripped the brāhmaṇas of all honor. The temple priests, in secret council, had concealed the murti of Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga. And that wretched king had even declared—"This temple shall be made a mosque!"

Hearing this grievous tale, Cāṅgadeva's heart trembled with emotion. He lamented: "Have I descended to earth and failed to uphold dharma and the Lord's fame? If Avindha has desecrated the temple," he resolved, "Then I shall restore and reconsecrate it!" With such determined will, he declared: "Let us proceed at once without delay."

He immediately summoned his disciples, instructing them, “Let us march to Bedar! There we shall witness the Lord’s deeds And restore righteousness.”

No sooner was his command spoken, than the sādhakas swiftly readied themselves. Along with other noble devotees and guardians, they set out together with great purpose. They carried the Garuḍa banners, blaring horns and drums, embroidered flags fluttered in the wind. The clash of cymbals and mṛdaṅgas echoed aloud—filling the skies with resounding divine music. With loud cries of “Vittal! Vittal!”

The Vaiṣṇavas sang His names in kīrtan, the sacred sound—nāda brahma—overflowed, and all were immersed in its divine bliss. With joyous claps and cries of “Jay! Jay!”

The assembly of devotees danced with delight. Cāṅgadeva, with loving playfulness, set forth at once in the company of the saints. As they journeyed, they sang kīrtans with ecstasy—expressing their deep love for the Lord. Villagers along the path heard these divine songs and were instantly uplifted toward liberation.

Cāṅgadeva, a siddha-yogī and master of truth, was revered by all. Wherever he approached, people ran forth for his darśan. They brought offerings of flowers and grains, honoured him in countless ways. Whatever vows or wishes they held in their hearts, he fulfilled them all with divine grace. Just as the Gaṅgā flows into the ocean and sanctifies every village along her banks—so too did the touch of the saints bring purification, granting liberation without any effort.

Thus, to confront Avindha and restore sanctity, the Vaiṣṇava devotees journeyed to Bedar. People from every town came for darśan—receiving both bhukti (worldly joy) and mukti (liberation). Wherever saints have settled, that land is called Vaikuṇṭha. Even the stones of such places are deemed to be divine.

The king now addresses the listeners: “Attend with humility to this sacred tale. The villages where saints resided have become renowned throughout all the worlds.”

Consider the holy region of Lohaḍaṇḍa: Even if Puṇḍalīk had not been born there, could we still call Paṇḍharpur ‘Vaikuṇṭha’? Ponder this well, O seeker! In the lowly village of Aḷaṅkāpūr, the great Śrī Jñāneśvar descended. Therefore, in the month of Kārtik, the great pilgrimage there reaches its peak. On the banks of the Godāvarī, near the Puṇya Stambha, Cāṅgadeva made his residence. Thus, on Āṣāḍha Śuddha Ekādaśī, multitudes gather at that sacred spot.

And though the village of Dehu may seem small, know that there, the saint Tuka was born. Therefore, for fifteen days leading to Hari Dīnī, countless Vaiṣṇavas journey there in devotion. Bodhala Kuṇbī was a devout Vaiṣṇava, born with the divine purpose of spreading the glories of devotion. When he descended upon this earth, he transformed the village of Dhāmaṇgāva into a veritable Pāṇḍharpur. This sacred truth is known throughout the land. Thus, the saints themselves established this holy village, and to them, it was nothing less than

Vaikuṇṭha itself. The faithful perceive this through their own experience, though others may remain unaware. In this dark age of Kali, where even the greatest of tīrthas (sacred places) are overwhelmed by worldly corruption, the Lord has made the villages of His devotees into sanctuaries—vibrant with His presence, far from the fears of common folk.

Wherever saints dwell, be it by a stream, river, well, or reservoir, that very place becomes a tīrtha, sanctified eternally by their presence. No obstacle dares approach such saints. If any does arise, it is quickly removed. Lord Śrīhari, with His Sudarśana Chakra, guards such places with vigilant grace. Such is the incomparable glory of the saints—beyond all simile or praise. Those who cultivate love and devotion in their hearts can win over even the Supreme Lord, Puruṣottama.

When a devotee falls into difficulty, Lord descend in his transcendental form, dispelling calamities at once and protecting His servant without delay. Thus, God and His devotee are of one heart and one mind—united, inseparable. Acting upon the divine command of the Lord, Cāṅgadeva set out toward Bedar.

As tales of his saintly deeds spread far and wide, people thronged the roads to see him. With reverent love, they offered prostrations and lovingly performed worship with deep sincerity. They offered food and humble items with hearts full of joy and sat to hear the glories of Lord Hari in divine kīrtana. All people were drawn into devotion—even the hardened souls were softened and transformed. Whatever wish one held within the heart, that very desire was fulfilled through the Lord's grace as they walked alongside the path of His servant. Such was the growing fame of Cāṅgadeva's journey.

On the way stood a particular town, and within it resided a renowned leader of wandering mendicants (jangaṁs)—a man of great prominence among ascetics. This man had mastered many kinds of sorcery and occult knowledge, skilled in deceptive practices. He had secured his position through his guru's blessings but had misused the power granted to him. Whenever a true saint came to his door, he would seat them on a special seat which, through hidden trickery, would suddenly collapse, throwing the saint to the ground in shame. He and his disciples would then mock the saint with laughter and jeers. This kind of humiliation he inflicted upon many sincere sants—until Lord Śiva Himself grew angry.

Just as Rāvaṇa, after mocking Śiva, was overcome with pride and attempted to abduct Sītā, only to be humbled by Hanumān, the devotee of Śrī Rāma—so too would this false ascetic be humbled. This jangaṁ, though externally a devotee of Lord Śiva, had corrupted himself with black magic and tormented many sādhus and saints.

Knowing this, Cāṅgadeva approached the same path boldly, determined to confront him. His followers said, "The Lord Himself will destroy the pride of this jangaṁ."

When the jangaṁ heard of Cāṅgadeva's virtues and fame, someone came and told him, "A saint is walking these roads, spreading divine nectar like a living Viṣṇudāsa."

Hearing this, the jangaṁ grew enraged and plotted mischief. He ordered preparations in anger, just like Duryodhana, who schemed against the Pāṇḍavas after hearing their glory. So furious was he upon hearing Cāṅgadeva's praises that he schemed to disgrace him. In his maṭha lived a dog whom he had mischievously named "Cāṅgadeva."

And when the true Cāṅgadeva arrived, this vile man mockingly called out to the dog by that name—revealing his twisted intent. But the great yogī, aware of all this, calmly proceeded toward the maṭha, unshaken. The Vaiṣṇava heroes sang kīrtanas with tāḷa, mṛdaṅga, and vīṇā, bearing banners aloft, their songs echoing through the skies like thunder. Hearing this divine music, the jangaṁ grew restless and agitated, just as demons tremble upon hearing the holy name of Viṣṇu.

Though he knew only a little of true spiritual power, he paraded himself with lofty titles, like a scorpion that holds only a trace of venom but sits upon a serpent's head. Empowered by his occult practices, he puffed himself up with pride. Even as Cāṅgadeva approached, he offered no greeting, no hospitality. The Vaiṣṇavas knew his crooked nature and whispered among themselves, "He intends to insult our Master. He deserves to be corrected."

But Cāṅgadeva humbly said to the ascetic, "I surrender unto you. Let us cast away ego and pride."

The deceitful man, knowing his intentions, offered a seat of his own making and cunningly said, "Come, sit here quickly!"

But Cāṅgadeva, with divine insight, saw through the plan. He had heard of many saints being insulted in this very way. He approached the seat without hesitation, only to be suddenly flung down—the tricked seat throwing him face-first to the floor.

"We call ourselves devotees of Pāṇḍuraṅga," proclaimed the saintly ones, "but even the age of Kali has laid its mark upon us."

To dispel arrogance, the saints said, "Let there be a miracle that will shatter pride and awaken humility."

Thus thinking, Śrī Cāṅgadeva sat in meditation. He blew sacred ash (vibhūti) onto Mallikārjuna's revered seat. Suddenly, a fierce fire arose, leaping skyward as if ignited from within the heavens. Seeing this blazing wonder with his own eyes, Mallikārjuna was seized with panic and rolled upon the ground in fear. He lamented, "It was by the power of this seat that I was regarded with respect among the people."

As the fire consumed the seat, Mallikārjuna was gripped by worry. "How will I satisfy my ego now?" he thought. Humbled, he bowed down before Cāṅgadeva and spoke with a softened tongue.

"This was a seat granted to me by the grace of my guru," he said. "It came to me through divine providence. Never should fire be allowed to touch it!" So saying, he clung to Cāṅgadeva's feet.

Like red-hot coals glowing in a dark room, the seat had once seemed vibrant, but when the rays of truth (like sunlight) struck it, it turned to ashes—just like charred wood. Such was the illusion of power that Mallikārjuna held, proud of his superficial knowledge. But when he beheld the true might of Cāṅgadeva, he became instantly subdued. Clasping the feet of that yogī, he pleaded, "Please do not completely destroy this seat by fire." Hearing the distress in his voice, the crowd around began to question him. With a mere breath of vibhūti, Cāṅgadeva had cast the seat to the ground, extinguishing the fire in an instant. This miracle was beyond compare.

Then, Mallikārjuna said to the Yogī, "Please sanctify my āśrama. Come inside and partake of a meal prepared especially for you."

Understanding the occasion, the devotee of Viṣṇu (Cāṅgadeva) agreed. He instructed his followers to prepare food and inform the saṃpradāya at Jangam to provide all required materials. Now, there was a dog that a wicked man had once tried to tie up and insult—this dog was none other than the divine companion of Cāṅgadeva, named Lavalāī. Fearing that Lavalāī might cause further disruption or perform another miracle, Mallikārjuna ordered it hidden deep in an underground cellar. Later, Cāṅgadeva himself instructed, "You too must begin cooking at once. Let us all dine in one common assembly."

To this, Mallikārjuna readily agreed. Food was prepared on both sides. When the cooking was complete, Cāṅgadeva offered the naivedya and performed the Vaiśvadeva rite, following all scriptural injunctions. Then, five hundred devotees of the Liṅgāyat order sat in lines, ready to dine in the presence of the great saint. Over a thousand pilgrims had gathered for this holy occasion. As both meals were served and the guests seated, Cāṅgadeva ensured even the smallest of creatures—animals, birds, insects—received food. Addressing Ayyā (Mallikārjuna), Cāṅgadeva said, "Our offering and Vaiśvadeva rites are now complete. Now you, who belong to the Śiva sect, may begin your worship of the liṅga."

All the liṅgāyats, hearing this, removed their robes and began inspecting their bodies—for each carried a liṅga. But to their astonishment, not one could find their liṅga! Panic-stricken, Mallikārjuna rushed to his guru and exclaimed, "Lord Śiva is surely angry with us! He has abandoned us and fled from our very beings! Though five hundred bodies sit here," he said, "not a single liṅga remains upon them. This is an impossible event, O revered guru—please explain this mystery!"

Overwhelmed, Mallikārjuna cried, "If Śiva has indeed left us, why should we cling to life anymore?"

Such was his despair. His disciples urged him: "O Sadguru, give us clarity according to the scriptures. But first, please inspect your own liṅga and stop this needless boasting. For one

who teaches others about Brahman," they said, "yet himself walks a path of deceit, he earns only hellish suffering in this life and the next."

Finally, Mallikārjuna removed his garments and inspected himself—and there, in a mere handkerchief, lay his missing liṅga. Ashamed to the core, he turned to Cāṅgadeva with folded hands. He pleaded, "Please dine now along with your entire following. We are humbled. It is clear—Śiva, the consort of Pārvatī, has left us and returned to Mount Kailāsa."

To this, the Yogī replied, "It is your own actions that created this separation. No living being in a monastery should ever be left hungry. That dog of Cāṅgadeva—he sat faithfully at your doorway. Yet you hid him in the cellar. That is why the Lord, the destroyer of Smara (desire), grew wrathful. This whole world is permeated by the liṅga form—by Śiva's very being. Why then did you hide the dog, who is none other than Him? Explain your reasoning."

"That dog was no ordinary being," Cāṅgadeva said. "He had swallowed every single liṅga within him. Now bring him out immediately."

Hearing this, the assembled liṅgāyats were dumbfounded. "He is a knower of the inner self!" they exclaimed. "This Vaiṣṇava sage is none other than the empowered by Lord Viṣṇu Himself, in the form of Cakrapāṇi!"

The dog was then brought up swiftly from the cellar. At that moment, Keśavadāsa, a servant of the Lord, stepped forward, "This mahant and his disciples have become liṅga-less," he declared. "Surely the dog must have swallowed the liṅgas. Cāṅgadeva, ask him to return them."

As this wondrous exchange unfolded, the assembly watched in awe. The dog lifted its head—and from its mouth, emerged every single liṅga, returned as they were. Witnessing this miracle, the liṅgāyats were struck with shame and humility. They each reclaimed their liṅgas and offered deep obeisance to Cāṅgadeva.

"You are indeed an incarnation of the Divine," they said. "A complete Vaiṣṇava. You have destroyed our pride and shown us a miracle beyond imagination."

With this realization, they resumed their worship of Śiva. Though the food had already been served, they now offered the naivedya with full reverence.

Cāṅgadeva, his heart fixed in meditation on Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga, withdrew his resolve, having completed his vow. Lord Viśvambhara, the enjoyer of the offering, accepted the prāṇāhuti (life-offering) of the food. Each received food as per their own taste and need. Animals, birds, even ants—none were left out from this divine distribution. The two saints, with their respective followers, sat together in a single line. With pure hearts and hands, they took their seats, and Cāṅgadeva presided over the meal. As the kīrtan concluded, the devotees of the Jangam order brought betel leaves and reverently offered them to all, with their own hands. A small bite of food was placed upon a tulasī leaf and offered as a garland to the Yogī, who was worshipped with full devotion.

Then Śrī Cāṅgadeva turned to Mallikārjuna and said gently, “Now I must journey to the city of Bedar. Be vigilant henceforth. Let your mind no longer be disturbed, nor let anyone be troubled by your actions. If one is adorned with the title of a Mahant, let him bow with humility before all. Only one who sees Supreme Lord Vishnu as a Super soul in all beings is truly blessed amidst worldly life. Let all beings be nourished. Let food be offered generously to all — for to think ‘I am the giver’ and be puffed with pride is no virtue. Let disciples serve, yes — but regard them with the same reverence as the Lord Himself. The worshipper and the worshipped are two great personalities. That alone makes a householder worthy. If a householder keeps his word, bless him. But never speak curses or harsh words — this is the way to be noble in the world.”

Hearing these nectar-like words of Cāṅgadeva, Ayyā Mallikārjuna’s heart softened with contentment. He said humbly, “As the Master has instructed, so shall I live from now on. But may your grace ever remain upon me,” he added, and with these words, he fell at Cāṅgadeva’s feet.

Lavalāī, the divine dog, was lifted up with affection, and Cāṅgadeva embraced Mallikārjuna with love. After bidding farewell, they all set off toward Bedar.

Such is the glory of saintly association — it melts even the hardest of hearts. Where is the comparison to such a one, who can bring even the Supreme Being under his sway?

At that time, the ruler of Bedar, an impure and arrogant tyrant, intoxicated by ignorance and youth, had brought ruin upon dharma. He demolished the holy temple at Paṇḍharpur and built a mosque in its place. To destroy his pride, Cāṅgadeva began his journey to that very place. He reached Bedar at midday and stopped at a lakeside to bathe. Having completed his daily bath and sandhyā rituals, the Yogī sat in meditation. Then he offered a little food as naivedya and began a divine kīrtan.

Dancing in procession with banners and saffron flags, the devotees played cymbals, veṇu, and mṛdaṅga in perfect melody. They began a heartfelt nāma-saṅkīrtana, garlands of God’s names sung with love: “Kṛṣṇa! Viṣṇu! Hari! Govinda! Acyuta! Ananta! Ānandakanda! Parama Puruṣa! Sac-cid-ānanda! Śrī Mukunda! Jagadguru!”

In this way they praised the Lord through stories, songs, and verses. The bliss of Brahman descended upon the earth, drawing crowds from all directions.

The presence of Cāṅgadeva drew thousands. Even the townspeople of Bedar — moved by faith — gathered to witness this divine scene. As the kīrtan echoed with cymbals and mṛdaṅgas, the resonance of Nāda-Brahman spread. Those who heard it were overwhelmed with joy and love. At that moment, a royal astrologer named Jośī — a noble Vaiṣṇava — came unexpectedly and bowed deeply to Cāṅgadeva. The kīrtan lasted a full prahar (three hours), during which Jośī remained seated, absorbed. At its conclusion, the devotees offered ārati to Rukmiṇī’s beloved, Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga. Prasāda and sweets were distributed, and Cāṅgadeva sat upon his seat in peace.

At that time, Jośī approached him respectfully and made a heartfelt request: “O Master, the king of Bedar — named Avindh — is a wicked and impious man. He has desecrated many temples and built mosques in their place. Whenever the tales of Śrī Hari or the Purāṇas are recited, he punishes the devotees. He has tried to uproot Sanātana Dharma and imposed foreign customs upon us. Even the temple of Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga was destroyed by this villain, who built a mosque in its place. No one dares oppose him — and the Lord has concealed Himself from this corrupted land. You may already know of these events, revered one. If so, then your presence here may not be wise. If the king learns of your arrival, he will surely act with violence and disrespect. None here are allowed to play mṛdaṅga or drum — by the order of the Yavana ruler. Seeing your fearless presence and the boldness of this procession, he may grow angry and act with cruelty. Had you approached the gates of Bedar itself, the king would have harassed you openly. But seeing your glory and following, he now grows anxious — and that is troubling him.”

Hearing these words, Cāṅgadeva asked calmly, “Tell me — what is it that has disturbed the king?”

The brāhmaṇa replied at once, “The king’s favorite consort — a woman of great beauty — was recently bitten by a snake. He summoned many physicians and vaidyas, but no one could save her. Her life departed, and her body now lies dead. They have filled her belly with fragrant herbs and perfumes, and prepared her in ceremonial fashion. Soon, they will send the corpse in a palanquin for burial. This has brought the king great sorrow, for she was dearest to him.”

Upon hearing this report, Cāṅgadeva responded at once: “Go tell the king — I shall raise the dead back to life. For the Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga, the giver of liberation, the ocean of divine attributes — has, by His grace, bestowed upon me the sanjīvanī mantra, the very essence of life. Through His power, even a lifeless corpse may be restored to breath. Tell the king that a devotee of Lord Viṣṇu has come to this place.”

Hearing this bold proclamation, the Vaiṣṇava brāhmaṇa was overjoyed. He hurried to the royal palace and reported the entire incident.

“O King,” he said, “your fortune is truly great! A realized saint has appeared — a siddha-puruṣa, perfected in yoga. He has lived for fourteen hundred years, untouched by the grip of time. By divine providence, he has come to this place today. He has declared that he will restore life to the dead consort. He made this vow to me, boldly and with conviction.”

Hearing this, the king replied to the brāhmaṇa, “Bring him to me without delay. If he can raise my wife from death — I shall give him whatever he asks, without hesitation.”

The brāhmaṇa then returned at once, his heart filled with reverence. Reaching Cāṅgadeva’s side, he bowed low and relayed the king’s invitation. After narrating the divine events of the past, the devotees urged, “O Master! Let us proceed without delay.”

With the Lord's name resounding in every breath, Śrī Cāṅgadeva set forth with his entire retinue. The air pulsed with devotion—a grand procession of Vaiṣṇavas, singing kīrtans, cymbals ringing, and mṛdaṅgas resounding in perfect harmony. The melodious chanting of the Lord's divine pastimes filled the skies, echoing with shouts of "Victory to Viṭṭhala!"

In such auspicious manner, the entourage arrived at the gates of the Yavana (Turkic) king's palace. The king came forth and honored Cāṅgadeva in various worldly ways—but not with a single bow of reverence. Scoffing inwardly, he murmured, "This is but another Hindu faqīr, full of outward display and falsehood. How can such a one possibly raise the dead?"

Perceiving the king's arrogance, Cāṅgadeva spoke firmly, "We are fearless Vaiṣṇava devotees. If one does not offer even a simple bow of reverence to a devotee of the Lord, how can he expect the favor of God?"

Without sincere devotion, even if one offers elaborate worship, rituals, and offerings, Rukmiṇī-ramaṇa—the Lord—remains unsatisfied. The scriptures declare this truth. Even if one fails in all forms of worship, yet bows in humility just once with a pure heart, the merit earned is boundless. Daily rites, scriptural recitation, ablutions, and offerings—all these may fall short, but a single act of heartfelt reverence can please the Supreme Lord entirely.

Salutation (namana) is an extraordinary sādhana. It reveals inner bhāva and is the simplest means to attain the Lord. It costs nothing—favors even the weak and destitute—and it crushes the ego. If one receives instructions from a true guru and offers mind, body, and wealth, but fails to bow with full surrender, all such effort is in vain. No bhakti is complete without salutation. No liberation is possible without surrender. But this Yavana king, lost in ego and delusion, harbors disdain in his heart.

Seeing this, Cāṅgadeva resolved to awaken true understanding in him—so that he may bow in reverence to the Vaiṣṇava saints and be redeemed. Thus, Yogināṭha (Cāṅgadeva) silently reached into his waistband, took a pinch of sacred ash, and smeared it upon his disciples.

Then, in that very moment, a wondrous miracle unfolded, as he scattered the sacred bhasma (ash) over the gathered devotees, their very forms were transformed! To the Hindus, they appeared as divine Vaiṣṇava heroes. To the Yavana king's eyes, they now looked like great prophets and pīrs.

Just as Śrī Kṛṣṇa appeared to Yaśodā as an infant, to Rādhā as a youthful lover, or to sages and devotees as the Supreme Brahman, the Lord with transcendental form—so too did these forms adapt to the beholder's faith.

Thus, Cāṅgadeva and his retinue took on forms seen through the lenses of each viewer's devotion. Such was the divine play that unfolded—marvelous and beyond mortal comprehension. Awestruck, the king was shaken to the core. He realized, "This saint is our true family deity!"

Overcome with remorse and reverence, he prostrated fully before Cāṅgadeva, his heart melting with love. The saint smiled kindly and said, “I am now pleased with you. Whatever wish lies in your heart—speak it now. I shall grant it without delay.”

The king bowed and pleaded, “O great soul! I am certain you are a true Vaiṣṇava, a divine incarnation. My only wish is this—please bring my beloved queen back to life!”

He wept and explained, “My cherished elder wife was bitten by a venomous serpent and died. Her body was laid on a bed of fragrant herbs, her organs removed, the corpse preserved. I cannot live in peace without her. Please, have mercy.”

Touched by his longing, Cāṅgadeva recalled the divine mantra of Rukmiṇī's grace, and invoked the sanjīvanī power of the Lord.

Taking sacred ash once more, he gave it to the king, instructing, “Smear this bhasma upon her forehead and all over her body with full faith. By Śrī Hari’s compassion, she shall arise immediately.”

The king ran home with haste and devotion, anointed her lifeless body with the sacred ash—and then, a wonder occurred! All at once, the queen stirred. She opened her eyes and sat upright, calling out! Though dazed and silent at first, she was alive—resurrected by divine grace. Still confused, the Yavana king came to Cāṅgadeva and said, “She lives, but her senses are lost. She knows nothing of her body or mind. What more must I do to restore her fully? Please show me.”

Cāṅgadeva answered gently, “Go to her and ask what she desires. Whatever boon she seeks, I shall grant it.”

The king entered the palace temple, where his queen now sat revived. He said, “Tell me, beloved—what it that your heart desires is?”

The queen, regaining clarity, said softly, “The one who restored my life—I shall surrender to him alone. Whatever he asks of me, I shall give. Only then will I be truly saved.”

Hearing her sincere vow, the king joyfully offered her to Cāṅgadeva’s care, and again bowed to the saint with love and humility.

Cāṅgadeva smiled and said, “Now that your wife is restored, what more do you desire? Ask freely. I know now that you recognize me as a representative of the Divine.”

The king laid before him piles of pearls, diamonds, and gold—but Cāṅgadeva laughed.

“We are renounced Vaiṣṇavas,” he said, “To us, gold and dust are the same. We lack nothing—for all siddhis serve those who serve the Lord.”

The king persisted, “Then allow me to do one final act in your service. Please command me.”

Then Śrī Cāṅgadeva revealed his true purpose: “In Paṇḍharpur, where Lakṣmī herself resides, your men have oppressed the temple priests, and you, in your pride, demolished the temple to build a mosque upon its gate! You have forsaken dharma and promoted adharma. Write now a decree with your seal—order the mosque to be removed, and the temple of the Lord to be restored at once.”

The king, chastened and awakened, wrote the command by his own hand, sealed it with his royal emblem, and swore an oath to uphold it. In the letter, he declared that henceforth, no harm must be done to that sacred site by any Yavana.

Śrī Cāṅgadeva received the decree and departed with it in hand, accompanied by four hundred of the Bedar king’s own officers. After applying sacred ash to all their foreheads, they took the skyward path, and reached Paṇḍharpur by midday. Cāṅgadeva’s arrival sent waves of joy through the troubled land. The devotees rejoiced, cymbals clashed, and kīrtans rang out. They declared, “With his divine powers, Cāṅgadeva has returned victorious, bearing the king’s own order to restore Lord Viṭṭhala’s temple!”

The people were overwhelmed with happiness, and gathered with grateful hearts to honor the saint. They said, “O Cāṅgadeva! You are a true hero of dharma! You have conquered the dark age of Kali with your pure bhakti!”

This marks the end of this chapter, where Śrī Rukmiṇī-var narrates the sacred tale.

As recorded by the poet, this ninth chapter of Bhakta Līlāmṛta overflows with devotional sweetness. To hear it is to fulfill all noble desires of the heart.

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Chapter 10

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ.

Search the purified essence of the earth, and there one beholds the lotus-like face of Lord Hari. His complexion is dark yet radiantly pure, adorned with the celestial Vaijayantī garland around His neck. His ears are adorned with earrings that sparkle like the planet Venus in the night sky. His golden yellow robe glows brighter than the heavens themselves—like a sudden flash of lightning across the sky. His graceful eyebrows frame eyes like blooming lotus petals. A gentle smile plays upon His lips, and sages fix their meditation upon the tip of His serene nose. The Kaustubha jewel, crystal clear and radiant, rests upon His chest. His arms are long, stretching to His knees, and mighty bracelets adorn His wrists. Just a glance at Him is enough to still the mind. He is the treasure-house of all divine opulence. His chest bears the sacred Śrīvatsa mark. Seeing the three horizontal lines upon His navel, even Goddess Lakṣmī is captivated and enchanted. A sacred thread of pearls adorns His waist. His lotus-like hands rest near His sides. Beholding His form, Lord Śiva himself becomes still and peaceful. His posture is graceful and tender. His feet rest evenly upon the divine brick. The devotee's mind forever dwells upon that sacred spot, absorbed in loving devotion.

In the previous chapter, it was narrated how Śrī Cāṅgadeva had travelled to Bedar. There, through divine power, he had raised the dead to life. After this miraculous act, he returned swiftly to Paṇḍharpur. Hearing the news of his return, the residents of the holy kṣetra were filled with joy. They eagerly came to see him, and with great affection, welcomed him with love and reverence. They said, “You are a true hero among Vaiṣṇavas. You have subdued the wicked through divine miracles. You have taken birth to revive the sacred path of bhakti and reestablish dharma.”

Cāṅgadeva had brought with him a royal decree from Bedar. He promptly presented it to the local village authorities. Without delay, laborers were engaged, and the mosque standing in the sacred precinct was quickly demolished. Skilled craftsmen were immediately appointed, and the construction of the temple began using proper instruments. For a small portion of labor (just a vīlabhara), workers were paid generously (a mūṭhabharī)—a sign of his magnanimity. Hearing of such liberal distribution, some skeptics began to wonder where such wealth was coming from. But near him stood all divine powers, ready to assist him in his sacred work. He who had astounded even the age of Kali, who had brought the dead back to life—could such a one not possess the resources to restore a temple? Such doubts were baseless.

When even Gorakṣanātha once doubted him slightly, a mountain of gold appeared before his eyes! As soon as he played the flute, Cāṅgadeva had miraculously emerged from the earth at that very place. Therefore, know him as the master of all siddhis—Vaṭeśvara Cāṅgadeva. Through pure devotion, he even brought the Supreme Lord under his control.

Though he had no desire for mystic powers and inwardly cared nothing for them, he accepted them solely for the service of the Lord—to accomplish divine work.

In the Viṣṇusahasranāma, the names "Bhaya-kṛt" (creator of fear) and "Bhaya-nāśana" (destroyer of fear) are given. These names of Śrī Hari were composed by the sage Dvaipāyana (Vyāsa). To make these names a reality, Cāṅgadeva destroyed the unlawful structure with his own righteous hands. Then, by displaying divine miracles in various ways, he brought great fame to the path of devotion. Knowing that the Lord's mission was yet incomplete, the Giver of Liberation—Lord Hari Himself—appeared to Cāṅgadeva. He revealed to him the Sanjīvanī mantra, and through that, Cāṅgadeva revived the Queen of the King. The King, overwhelmed with joy and gratitude, gave Cāṅgadeva a written decree. Work on the temple began again immediately, and the mosque was demolished fully without delay.

Two thousand men were engaged daily, working steadily on the temple construction. Even the setting sun seemed to assist him, dimming its rays as if bowing to his cause. For one full year, Cāṅgadeva remained in Paṇḍharpur, overseeing the temple work. When the structure neared completion and the spire was to be installed, brāhmaṇas were consulted to find an auspicious time. The brāhmaṇas declared, "Choose this day—Kārtik Daśamī—as it is supremely auspicious. Seat Rukmiṇī Devī on the lion-throne, and by Her darśana alone, even the most ignorant will be uplifted."

Hearing this, everyone agreed to install the divine murti in the sanctum. Cāṅgadeva, along with the head priests, descended into the underground sanctum. There, in the hidden chamber, they beheld the original murti of Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga, and at once, Cāṅgadeva prostrated fully with deep reverence. For nearly two years, the Lord had received no formal worship. His head bore an old, worn cap, and His divine body was covered in dust. Yet, He still stood poised and gentle, both hands resting at His waist. He was draped in a simple cloth, standing firmly on the divine brick—Lord of the Universe, silent and majestic. To Cāṅgadeva, it appeared as if the Lord had entered into deep yogic samādhi, just like a yogi. To witness this mystery, the Lord had seated Himself there, awaiting this divine moment. Seeing this wondrous vision with his own eyes, Cāṅgadeva softly spoke, overwhelmed with emotion: "O Lord of Lords, Giver of Liberation, Your glorious fame is resplendent in the ancient Purāṇas…"

As Cāṅgadeva beheld the Lord hidden beneath the temple, he wondered aloud in reverent awe, "O Lord of Paṇḍharpur! Why do You remain hidden in this underground chamber? Is it to silently observe the conduct of Your devotees? Is this concealment a divine play of Your illusion? You, who once became a fish and caught the demon Śaṅkhāsura in the depths of the ocean—how then do You hide Yourself now in this chamber? O Lord of Paṇḍharpur, this amazes me. You who took the form of a great tortoise and bore Mount Mandara upon Your back—are You now afraid of the Yavanas, hiding within? This is truly wondrous to me. You once took the form of the mighty boar and raised the Earth upon Your tusks. How is it

then that You remain concealed in this hidden room? My heart is filled with astonishment. Remembering the devotion of Prahlāda, You manifested from the pillar as Narasiṃha—why then do You now sit hidden below the ground? This mystery leaves me speechless. You took the form of the Vāmana and bound the demon Bali, sending him to the underworld. And yet now, it seems as if even the darkness of Kali Yuga has overpowered You. This, too, astonishes me. You, as Paraśurāma, destroyed the unrighteous and made the Earth free of kṣatriyas. Yet now, afraid of the Yavanas, do You truly hide? For one who uplifted the world, this is most perplexing. You incarnated as Śrī Rāma, and destroyed Rāvaṇa and Kumbhakarṇa. And yet now, as if that glory is forgotten, You sit concealed in this place. As Śrī Kṛṣṇa, You performed countless divine pastimes and destroyed many wicked demons. And yet now, in this age of Kali, why do You hide Yourself from me, seated beneath the earth? You are the complete chastiser of Kali Yuga—that is the well-known declaration of the Purāṇas. If so, then why do You, who possess such power, sit hidden like this? Please reveal the reason to my heart."

When Cāṅgadeva spoke these heartfelt words, the compassionate Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga smiled and replied: "O beloved devotee, know that I hid Myself here out of a clever plan—to increase the glory and fame of My true devotees. Foreseeing what was to come, I Myself approached you, O friend of My heart, and gave you the Sanjīvanī mantra, thereby extending the shadow of My grace. I am indeed the Creator and Orchestrator of this universe. That ancient truth remains unchanged. It was I who gave the Yavana king distorted intelligence, so that he would act unjustly. Then, assuming the form of a serpent, I struck and took the life of his queen. But as soon as you arrived, like Dhanvantari himself, I gave you the opportunity to bestow healing and gain victory. Though I am beyond all attributes—formless, actionless, and beyond ritual—I concealed Myself here only so that your fame would be exalted and remembered."

As the Lord of mercy spoke thus, Cāṅgadeva experienced an inner realization. His heart overflowed with devotion, and tears of bliss streamed from his eyes as his love grew ever more intense. Then, bowing low, he touched his head to the lotus feet of the Lord and lifted the sacred murti. At that very moment, the gathered devotees began clapping joyously, chanting in victory, their voices echoing with "Jaya! Jaya!"

As the Lord's deity was brought out of the underground sanctum, the residents of the sacred land rejoiced. Eager for the Lord's darśana, all came forth with reverence to behold the Lord of all gods. When Rukmiṇī Devī was seated upon the lion throne, all remaining doubts and evil vanished. A grand festival was held, and devotees joyously raised the sound of nāma-saṅkīrtana. At that auspicious time, Cāṅgadeva addressed the assembly, "Let us now take the murti to the banks of the Bhīmā River and bathe the Lord there."

All accepted this idea wholeheartedly. Placing the Lord in a splendid palanquin, they carried Him in procession to Candrabhāgā, the sacred river. Accompanied by cymbals and mṛdaṅgas, the devotees sang with great love and devotion. Banners waved, conches blew,

and drums resounded in celebration. Every kind of auspicious instrument played in joyful union. Flags fluttered in various colors, and the sky resounded with divine vibrations. Reaching the riverbank, they brought the Lord to the sacred spot of Puṇḍalīka, and bathed Him with Vedic mantras. Crowds gathered to witness this extraordinary event. Suddenly, at that very moment, the river Candrabhāgā swelled and rose. Just as waves rise in the sea, so too did the river flow upward in divine motion. Even the arid sands of the riverbank were swept over. All the pilgrims present received a full ceremonial bath. They exclaimed with joy, "Blessed is this auspicious day! All our sins have been washed away."

After bathing the Lord, they turned to Puṇḍalīka and circumambulated him. For he was the Lord's most beloved devotee, the cherished friend of the Lord of love. Then, in a celestial form, the King of the Immortals, Lord Viṣṇu, arrived mounted upon His divine chariot. The demigods declared, "This Earth has now become supremely sanctified—for the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha Himself has descended here."

Hearing this, the divine sages and celestial beings showered flowers from the sky. The Vaiṣṇava devotees, gathered in groups, sang kīrtana with joy and divine pleasure. The resounding beat of drums filled the heavens, and the sound of musical instruments reverberated throughout the skies. With tuneful melody and full devotion, the Haridāsas sang with reverence. As dancers performed divine dances in rhythm with the music, the palanquin bearing the Lord moved gracefully behind them. The crowd pressed eagerly to catch sight of the Supreme Brahman seated in visible form.

The people joyfully said, "Let the Lord remain outside the sanctum a little longer—so we can feast our eyes on Him!" They gazed upon Him lovingly and continuously. But once the Lord was taken inside and placed on His divine throne, their focus turned to heartfelt service and devotion. Tears of joy flowed from their eyes as they welcomed Him with love, feeling blessed to behold the very Lord who grants liberation. At the main temple gate, the golden deity of Śrī Rukmiṇī's beloved, Śrī Viṭṭhala, was brought with festive processions. With hands raised and hearts overflowing, the devotees carried the Lord inside. As soon as He was enthroned, He was given the pancāmṛta-snāna—ritual bathing with five sacred substances: milk, curds, ghee, honey, and Jaggery.

Devotees came forward, each bringing vessels full of these offerings. The Supreme Lord of the senses, Viṭṭhala, appeared glorious beyond description. It was as though He had awakened and manifested anew in Paṇḍharpur during the auspicious month of Kārtika. From the month of Āśvina till the tenth day of Kārtika, the Lord was bathed daily with milk. His divine form, already dark like the monsoon cloud, shone brilliantly under the white streams of milk. As white stars glitter in the night sky, so too did the Lord gleam under the flow of milk and curds—resplendent and divine. After the ceremonial bath, He was dressed in fine clothes and adorned with beautiful ornaments.

A yellow silk cloth was wrapped around His waist, and a glittering crown was placed on His head. Makara-shaped earrings dangled from His ears. He was decorated with many flower garlands, a saffron tilak on His forehead, and fragrant sandal paste on His limbs. Tulasi and lotus garlands hung from His neck. His dark form shone with immense beauty. Incense, ghee-lamps, and camphor were offered in the āratī ceremony. A variety of food items were prepared and offered to Him with devotion. Brāhmaṇas recited sacred mantras, and flowers were offered with reverence. Śrī Rukmiṇī and Śrī Satyabhāmā too were worshipped with love and devotion. Outside at the main gate, Vaiṣṇavas sang joyfully. Brāhmaṇas, having bathed and purified themselves, were offered delicious food like royalty. Cāṅgadeva personally served betel leaves and dakṣiṇā to them with his own hands.

Each household in the town joined in the celebration. Married women were given turmeric and vermilion, and they too waved fivefold āratī before the Lord's form with love. They lovingly praised the beautiful form of Śrī Hari. Just as the people of Ayodhyā rejoiced with oil lamps upon Rāma's return from exile, so too did the people of Paṇḍharpur celebrate with great happiness as the Lord returned to His throne.

In every home, sugar towers and festive sweets were distributed. It was as if the dark new moon had passed, and a bright moon had risen. For almost two years, the deity of the Lord had remained hidden, causing the devotees great anguish. Now, once again, they could have His darśana. Because of Śrī Cāṅgadeva's efforts, the temple was restored, and the holy town came alive again. People declared with joy, "Blessed is this great Vaiṣṇava! He is the uplifter of the entire world!"

One day, Cāṅgadeva entered the sanctum and offered full prostrations to the Lord of Paṇḍharpur. With devotion, he asked the Lord, "Where would You wish me to take samādhi?"

The Lord, Rukmiṇī's beloved, replied, "The banks of the Godāvarī River are most sacred. There, at a place called Puṇya-stambha, you will take samādhi. And every year, on Āṣāḍha Śuddha Ekādaśī, I Myself will come to your resting place."

The Lord added, "Your disciples and followers will continue this tradition. They will carry the sacred flags (pālkhī) and go on pilgrimages to Paṇḍharpur during Kārtika. They will bear the burden of their sins, and I will accept them with grace. Those who come for darśana during Āṣāḍhī Daśamī will see Me again at the Godāvarī. For them, it will be as though Paṇḍharpur itself has been revealed there."

Having granted these divine blessings, the Lord filled Cāṅgadeva with great joy. Cāṅgadeva then called two of his dear disciples and entrusted them with the responsibility of leading kīrtana (devotional singing). He told his noble son Varada, "On Kārtika Ekādaśī, offer food to the Lord and perform the anna-śānti feast." That tradition continues to this day in the family line of Vāmśī (cowherds), descendants of the gopa clan.

Cāṅgadeva stayed in Paṇḍharpur until the temple was fully restored. From that time onward, the Kārtika pilgrimage has been celebrated year after year. Devotees, bowing at the Lord's lotus feet, offer prayers with tear-filled eyes, saying, "O Lord of Paṇḍharī, Supreme among the gods, please show me Your mercy. Apart from You, who else can care for the destitute like me?"

The Lord gently answered, "I always reside in your heart. But now listen carefully. The Ṣaḍakṣarī mantra I have given you—teach it to your disciples. Let your lineage continue in service and devotion. The mantra I've given bears fruit for none but you. Still, pass it on to the worthy." Saying this, the Lord of Paṇḍharpur lovingly bowed before Cāṅgadeva.

He said, "Every year, on Āṣāḍha Śuddha Ekādaśī, I will personally come to your samādhi and worship you there. Those who come then on pilgrimage will receive My grace. I say this truth three times. On Daśamī, there must be a dindī (devotional flag procession). On Ekādaśī, there must be kīrtana. And on Dvādaśī, distribute prasāda. This is My firm command."

With these blessings, Cāṅgadeva prepared to leave Paṇḍharpur and journey to the appointed place of samādhi. Overwhelmed, he fell at the Lord's lotus feet with gratitude and devotion, crying with emotion. He prayed, "O Anāthanātha (Protector of the helpless), O Hari, always remain affectionate to me!" Seeing this, Rukmiṇī gently asked the Lord, "What boon have You granted him?"

Having received the Lord's command, Cāṅgadeva journeyed to the Gaṅgā and saluted all the great saints present there. Carrying the sacred flag, Cāṅgadeva set out swiftly toward Paṇḍharpur. He was eager to restore the temple and call upon Lord Śārṅgadhara (Viṭṭhala) once more. Upon reaching the banks of the Candrabhāgā River, he offered loving prayers and invited his dearest friend and Lord—his own eternal companion—back to His restored abode. With love rooted in the heart, they delighted in each other's presence.

Then, bowing low and placing his head at the Lord's feet, Cāṅgadeva said with reverence, "O Lord, please come to the banks of the Godāvarī and bestow samādhi upon me there."

The Lord, the Supreme Yogeśvara, listened to his request and gently responded, "So be it."

Then, descending the riverbank of Bhīmā, He swiftly moved across and began His return journey. Like a daughter departing for her husband's home, turning back again and again to look, the Lord kept glancing at Cāṅgadeva, overcome by separation. After escorting His dearest devotee to the riverbank, Lord Hṛṣīkeśa returned to His temple at Rāuli (Paṇḍharpur). Cāṅgadeva, along with his community of disciples, then traveled toward Puṇya-stambha, the sacred site chosen for his samādhi.

As they neared the holy place, the villagers came out to welcome him. They bowed and greeted the great Yogi with heartfelt devotion. Cāṅgadeva entered his own temple nearby and bowed before the divine deity of Lord Keśava. He had two sons—let me tell you their

names. The elder son was named Keśava, and the younger was called Viṭhobā. Calling them both to his side, he said with affection, “My dear sons, receive my blessings.”

He completed all the ceremonial worship and placed consecrated water upon their heads. At that sacred moment, he entrusted them with the Ṣaḍakṣarī mantra and instructed them to continue the spiritual lineage.

He said, “After I enter samādhi, you, my son Viṭhobā, must serve the Lord with devotion. Lead the pilgrimage to Paṇḍharpur every year during Kārtika, as per our vow. And you, Keśava, must continue the daily worship of the mūrti of the Lord. On Āṣāḍhī Daśamī, organize the dindī (flag procession) as a sacred tradition.”

Having instructed his sons in this way, Cāṅgadeva chose the exact day for his samādhi. It was Śaka 1247 (1325 CE), during the year named Krodhana. The auspicious day fell on Jyeṣṭha Śuddha Saptamī, a Sunday, under the Puṣya nakṣatra, during Siddha Yoga. This Bhānu Saptamī (Sunday with Saptamī tithi) was a supremely sacred occasion. On this very day, Yogeśvara Cāṅgadeva resolved to attain samādhi.

Keśava then began the worship of the Lord’s deity with sixteen forms of loving devotion (ṣoḍaśopacāra-pūjā). After bowing in full prostration, he asked the Lord’s permission and departed to begin the ceremony. The Vaiṣṇavas arrived with cymbals, vīṇās, and mṛdaṅgas. Kīrtana resounded in all directions. Vedic brāhmaṇas and temple residents joined the gathering in great numbers.

As Cāṅgadeva prepared for samādhi, the crowds swelled. Everyone chanted the name of Viṭṭhala with great fervor, offering worship and sacred gifts. Flag processions and various musical instruments rang out joyously. In this grand celebration, they all reached the Soma-tīrtha, near the Godāvarī. There, after bathing in the holy waters, they worshipped Lord Someśvara. The entire pilgrimage was completed with firm resolve, and Lord Janārdana fulfilled the desire of His devotee.

Cāṅgadeva, full of humility and love, offered his final prostrations to all, saying, “May the Lord always bestow His grace upon you.” These were his final words to the gathering.

Seeing this, all the assembled devotees fell at Cāṅgadeva’s feet in deep reverence. Tears streamed down their faces. They cried, “Will we ever have your darśana again?”

Then Cāṅgadeva approached the base of a great aśvattha (peepul) tree and sat in padmāsana (lotus posture). Meditating deeply on the lotus feet of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga, he entered a state of perfect stillness. At that very moment, the Lord manifested before him in His transcendental form. Cāṅgadeva worshipped Him mentally, offering celestial flowers and divine offerings in his heart. That soul, now united with the Supreme, left his body and entered the divine realm of Vaikuṇṭha. He was freed from bodily consciousness and entered the abode of Lord Krishna (Panduranga).

Cries of "Victory to Viṭṭhala!" and "Jaya Jaya!" resounded. The Vaiṣṇavas at Avsari sang kīrtana with loving intensity. With flowers and devotion, they worshipped Śrī Hari. After the samādhi ceremony, the devotees returned home. Yet from that time onward, a sacred pilgrimage began. More and more pilgrims visited the site with each passing year. Every day, kīrtana and devotional gatherings were held at that place. Learned brāhmaṇas narrated the Purāṇas. Especially in the month of Āṣāḍha, the great pilgrimage reached its peak.

Twelve years passed after the samādhi. Then, a surprising and extraordinary event unfolded—one that must now be shared with careful attention. The elder son, Keśava, harbored jealousy toward his younger brother Viṭhobā. He wanted to maintain superiority in all matters and was troubled by his brother's spiritual position. Though their father had taught righteous conduct and instructed the elder son to guide his younger brother, Keśava's heart could not accept it. He remained attached to worldly pride and ego.

Twelve years after Cāṅgadeva's samādhi, Viṭhobā came to Avsari and said, "My Master gave me this sacred instruction. Please grant me the spiritual guidance He had promised."

Though that elder son, Keśava, displayed outward humility, his mind remained perverse and steeped in arrogance. The strange course his destiny was to take was hidden from him; how could one know the effects of their past karma? He brazenly declared, "You have no right to even chant the Ṣaḍakṣarī mantra. I am the elder, seated on the family throne, eating my fill and living in comfort. Who are you to speak?"

Thus did he mock and insult Viṭṭhoba, causing the deep anguish. Viṭṭhoba thought sorrowfully, "He refuses My instruction—what means are left to guide him?"

That elder brother harassed and troubled his younger kin in countless ways. Just seeing them from a distance, he considered them as enemies. Though he would receive worship and speak with humility before others, his heart remained full of envy toward true devotees, thereby defiling his inner self. Seeing this decline in his behavior, Viṭṭhala became disheartened. So He went and sat at the very place where Śrī Cāṅgadeva was absorbed in samādhi.

There, taking no fruit, food, or grain, He established His own resolute renunciation. Praying with sincerity, the Lord said, "O Master, please reveal Your sacred feet unto Me—just once—for My sake."

For three days and nights, Viṭṭhoba remained there in firm resolve, without rest or sleep. Then suddenly, Śrī Cāṅgadeva appeared, granting His divine darśan. With a bundle of grass in hand, the great yogī revealed Himself in splendor. Awakening His beloved son with gentle care, He said, "Tell Me, child—what boon do you desire from Me?"

Beholding that divine form, Viṭṭhala fell prostrate in full daṇḍavat praṇāma. He cried, "O Master! Grant Me Your grace," and clutched His feet with devotion. Pleased by his plea, Cāṅgadeva consoled his dear son, saying, "Do not be troubled. Return swiftly to your home.

With My blessings, I shall now reveal the pure tradition and sampradāya. Once this is passed on, I shall return to samādhi. Do not remain anxious in your heart."

Having spoken thus, the Yogīśvara sent Viṭṭhoba swiftly home. As the sun rose gloriously that morning, great celebration spread across the land. On the tenth day of the month, devotees arrived at the samādhi with flags and dindī processions. Beholding Śrī Cāṅgadeva with their very eyes, all were struck with wonder. They exclaimed, "It has been twelve long years since He entered samādhi! Now, we are blessed to see Him again!"

The entire region echoed with the news: "Śrī Cāṅgadeva has manifested once more!" Multitudes gathered for darśan, offering their salutations with hearts full of faith. As the dindī proceeded, Viṭṭhoba led the way through the village. Devotees sang kīrtan in praise of Lord Viṣṇu, and Śrī Cāṅgadeva joined them in their joyous journey.

Reaching the temple swiftly, Cāṅgadeva rebuked his elder son with divine fury. "You, wretched one! You broke My command. Therefore, I shall see to it that your lineage ends."

But then, seeing Viṭṭhoba with compassion, He granted His blessing. He revealed the future course of the family, saying: "Your lineage shall flourish with bhakti. Many devotees shall be born, who shall carry forward Our vow and dharma. For six generations, a great pilgrimage shall be held here, increasing in spiritual glory and fame. Be certain of this in your heart. But with the seventh generation, this tradition shall disappear. Such is what I perceive with divine vision. The seventh descendant shall be devoid of bhakti and cease the worship of Lord Keśava. Because of invasions by Yavanas (foreign aggressors), the samādhi shall be desecrated and scattered. People will grow spiritually weak and cease to visit this sacred place. Then, in the future, to restore all once again, I Myself shall incarnate in your lineage."

Having uttered this prophecy, Cāṅgadeva returned to His samādhi. Witnessing this marvel, the people were filled with awe and reverence. They declared, "Blessed is the līlā of the Yogīśvara! He who remained hidden in samādhi for twelve years has now spoken and blessed His son before all!"

That son, Viṭṭhoba, was henceforth known as Cāṅgadeva. He too spread the fame of his spiritual lineage and increased the greatness of the family. To Viṭṭhoba was born a son named Pilājī Gosāvī, who walked in the footsteps of his noble father and maintained the sanctity of the vow. From him was born the jewel-like Narahari Gosāvī. His son was Saguna, and his name was Janārdana. In the house of Janārdana, seven sons were born. Let us now listen with attention to how the lineage continued from there. Among those seven sons, one was named Mudhojī. He in turn had five sons, who all lived in prosperity and dharmic ways. Among those five, the eldest was Gopāl. In his time, dharma declined and faded. What the Yogīśvara had foretold now came to pass—his words proved true for all to see. Then Śrī Cāṅgadeva Himself reincarnated, this time bearing the name Koṇerī. Born into His own lineage, He took human form again.

That Koṇerī was a man of merit and long life. He revived the tradition of bhakti that had fallen into decline. He re-established the samādhi shrine and planted an aśvattha tree at the site. There, he built a complete monastery and sanctified it. On Āṣāḍha Śuddha Ekādaśī, the people once again began to gather for pilgrimage. Bathing in the Godāvarī, they listened to kīrtans with rapt attention. Then, accompanied by their families and bearing flags, they traveled to Paṇḍharpur for Kārtikī Ekādaśī. Beholding the embodiment of the Supreme in transcendental form atop the brick, they felt inward peace and contentment. That deity of bhakti, jnāna, and vairāgya—I too have seen Him with my own eyes! Blessed indeed is the unfathomable līlā of the saints, who alone are fit to uphold the Bhāgavata dharma.

That Koṇerī Gosāvī was none other than Cāṅgadeva Himself. He took a human body out of compassion to uplift the ignorant and spiritually blind. Śyāmjī Gosāvī, his son, narrated this entire story in detail. I have composed these verses by drawing from his sacred words and adding scriptural insights. As milk carries cream within it, so too do saints recognize truth hidden within outwardly simple words. Even if milk is bland, it nourishes the entire household. Just as Śrī Kṛṣṇa sent a short message to Rukmiṇī, so have I written only as much as needed. Without ever departing from the true foundation, I have provided four brief examples—through these, this great text has grown in clarity. The wise and thoughtful will understand. To the seeker, the giver is the support; to the blind, the sighted one is a refuge. Likewise, for me, the words of Bhakta Līlāmṛta are my support, and the saints, my guide. That compassionate giver of liberation shall speak again through a sweet voice. May the Lord of the Earth always take refuge in His words with love.

Thus ends the Tenth Chapter of the Śrī Bhakta Līlāmṛta, resplendent with sweetness and devotion, fulfilling the hearts of all true lovers of the Lord.

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Chapter 11

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ.

Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga is the very treasure-house of infinite beauty, the source from whom all loveliness arises. He is the bestower of liberation and stands upon the brick in Paṇḍharpur, with both hands resting gracefully on His hips. It is by His power that the moon and sun radiate their light, yet this very Supreme Being, taking on a sagacious form, appears as a dark, cloud-like figure standing still in the holy land of Paṇḍharpur. The Lord of Lakṣmī, the one who rests on the cosmic serpent Śeṣa, now stands visibly before His devotees, relishing bliss and affection upon the sacred brick. Even the great Lord Śiva meditates on Him in the deepest silence, within the innermost chamber of his heart. That same Lord descended to the banks of the Bhīmā River, just to meet His beloved devotee Puṇḍalīka. Though He is beyond the reach of yogis who strive through aṣṭāṅga-yoga, and although He alone creates, sustains, and dissolves the universe by His mere will, He chose to dwell by the riverbank for the sake of a single, devoted soul. Even Brahmā, the Creator, as a child, cannot comprehend the fullness of His being. Yet that same Lord gave Himself completely to His devotee, becoming the boon-giver of Puṇḍalīka. By His divine will, the sacred text Bhakta Līlāmṛta came into being. He ensured that the glory of His devotee would shine far and wide, renowned as the beloved of Rukmiṇī.

In the previous tale, a wondrous event unfolded—Śrī Cāṅgadeva entered deep samādhi. After twelve years passed, he returned from that transcendental state and reunited with his son.

Now the scene shifts to the land of Punjab, where the great, enlightened soul Guru Nānak lived. When renunciation arose in his heart, he encountered an unexpected obstacle. He began to reflect: “Though I feel the urge to renounce everything, I possess immense wealth and material goods. How should I now put them to meaningful use?” This question stirred deeply within his heart. He realized that wealth often brings great harm. It can even lead to the destruction of life. Though a person may feel detached when receiving wealth, he soon becomes entangled in desires. Even the hope of acquiring wealth can turn friends into enemies. It creates distance between companions and fills the heart with inner turmoil. Wealth breeds wicked thoughts and corrupts the mind of even the sincere spiritual seeker. Thieves grow bold around wealth and are willing to risk their very lives to steal it. Those who possess wealth must live in fear of enemies and political forces. Even kings feel threatened by the rich. A wealthy man, though prosperous, is always vulnerable to raids and robbery. If a renunciate still clings to wealth mentally, people will mock his detachment. Accepting gifts from others drains one’s spiritual merit and diminishes previously earned virtue. Even devoted, affectionate Vaiṣṇavas, when they come into possession of wealth, are liable to forget God and become absorbed in worldly pursuits. The mind of a wealthy person constantly burns in anxiety. He becomes restless trying to protect what he owns. Though he

has everything, he remains unsatisfied. Truly, wealth itself becomes the cause of disturbance and sorrow."

Thinking in this way, Guru Nānak asked himself, "If I am indeed wealthy, how should I spend this wealth meaningfully?" Resolving to act, he gave up all pride and worldly identity, and surrendered himself fully to the worship of Śrī Hari. With that determination, he engaged himself in temple service. But a wicked and impious king saw this and grew filled with hatred and jealousy.

This was the dreadful era of Kali, and the land was ruled by a cruel and foolish Yavana king. He had torn down temples throughout the land, and no one had the strength to resist him. The king harassed brāhmaṇas, renunciants, and devotees of Lord Viṣṇu. News soon reached Guru Nānak that the temples had been destroyed. Hearing this, Nānak's mind was deeply disturbed. He asked himself, "What can be done to respond to this calamity?" He reflected on the many types of people in the world, each with different natures and temperaments. Just as the world contains countless inert and living beings with different instincts, so too are there humans whose behaviors are astonishing. Some even consume filth, while beasts devour such things with delight. There are beings who die upon eating a particular substance. Everyone knows such truths, yet worms are still born among them. One may wonder, how can the noble and pure survive in such conditions? Some beings survive solely on air, while others partake of food offered with love. Some live on grass, others on water alone. Some kill living beings and eat flesh, dwelling in darkness and ignorance. Truly, life often feeds upon life—this is a truth without any doubt. Consciousness exists in all living bodies. This is a principle confirmed by wise souls. Yet nature appears in a multitude of forms, and this variation is a deep, unfathomable mystery. Mustard seeds, onions, and sugarcane are all planted in the same soil, yet they sprout differently according to their nature. The seed alone determines the form that will emerge. In the same way, the Supreme Consciousness dwells in all bodies, but expresses itself differently in each. Each being becomes what it is meant to be, and the wise do not try to alter this. Recognizing that each being acts according to its nature, Nānak decided to maintain equanimity and accept the world as it is. With this clarity in his heart, he began to address and question the people of the world with understanding.

The impious king detested temples. Just the sight of them filled his heart with hatred. One wonders what truly pleased his mind—such was the subtle and sorrowful question to consider. People around would whisper that the Yavana king had an affinity only for mosques. So why should anyone else bother to pursue spiritual perfection through other means? Why should the wise force their own beliefs upon others? The Hindus are fond of deity forms of the Lord, while the impious one (the Yavana) prefers the concept of the formless, nirguṇa, as symbolized by the mosque. Seeing this division, Guru Nānak began to reflect deeply—what path should I take now?

He thought, “When temples are constructed, they are destroyed by the wicked; but the mosques are allowed to remain for a long time. Then, what truly lies in the heart of this Yavana king? I must act in alignment with that truth.”

With this decision, Guru Nānak summoned a group of stonemasons and builders. He instructed them, “Go now and begin constructing a mosque. I have given the command—start the work immediately.”

Once the work on the mosque began, the Yavana king rejoiced in his heart. He said, “Look! Nānak has spent all his wealth. Soon, he will become our fakir.”

Thinking his own religion superior and true, the Yavana believed that the path of the mosque had now begun. But he failed to understand the depth and intention in Nānak’s heart. Meanwhile, people of Nānak’s own community began criticizing him. They accused him of abandoning the Hindu dharma, saying, “He tears down temples and builds mosques in their place!”

Such was their feeling—like a person struck on both sides. Nānak, too, felt a similar weight in his soul. He thought, “Now, there must be a way where both can find peace. I must create such a solution.”

Then, many domed enclosures were built, blending the architectural style of both temples and mosques. Seeing this clever arrangement, people laughed. Both Hindus and Muslims came together and asked Nānak, “What have you done?” He replied, “I have created something that will be useful to both of you. That was the only solution I could see. To the wise (Yavana), the nirguṇa, formless Reality is supreme. To the devotees, the Lord’s deity form is beloved. But each group only clings to its own view, arguing and debating endlessly. These disputes never truly end. Some declare that Śiva is supreme, the one whom they worship constantly. Others claim that everything is false, that the entire world is an illusion created by Brahman alone. Yet it is said in the Purāṇas that this world is the creation of Brahmā. By meditating on this very Brahman, all desires are fulfilled. On the other hand, the Vaiṣṇavas lovingly declare that Brahmā was born from the navel of Lord Viṣṇu. For them, that dark-hued Lord, the Supreme of all gods, must be worshipped at all times. Those who follow the Sauras say that the sun is the greatest, for it sheds light upon the whole world. Without it, they say, there would be only darkness. The ritualists say that Indra is the greatest among gods, because by his command, the clouds bring rain to the earth. From the clouds comes food; from food, all living beings arise. According to the karmakāṇḍa tradition, the ritualists present such arguments. Karma (action), upāsanā (devotion), and jnāna (knowledge)—these three paths have been divided in the Vedas by Nārāyaṇa Himself. The sages studied all three branches and separated them clearly. Whatever comes from the mouth of one’s own guru is believed to be the ultimate truth. Without fully understanding the principles, people fall into argument with one another. Thinking over all this—the diversity of views and paths—one realizes that even a lifetime would not be enough to sort

them all. It is better now to give up all these doctrinal entanglements and simply fix the mind upon God."

But people become entangled in the identity and pride of wealth. Their minds get bound to it. That is why Nānak had arranged for temple construction—but this idea never pleased the Yavana king's mind. So, understanding the king's inclinations, Nānak began construction of a mosque. But in doing so, his own community's minds became agitated, and they began openly criticizing him. Between a rock and a hard place, Nānak conceived another clever solution. "Let there be many domed structures that can serve both faiths," he thought. These domed enclosures, called setkhaṇe, were constructed in large numbers so that both Hindus and Muslims could use them in their own way.

Nānak told them, "This is for the benefit of both communities. I have answered your question through these enclosures. Now make your own decisions as you see fit."

Hearing Nānak speak in this way, both Hindus and Muslims laughed. Amazed by his approach, they returned to their homes in thought. By the power of pure, sāttvic renunciation, Guru Nānak had overcome all six enemies of the mind—lust, anger, greed, pride, delusion, and envy. He became calm and unshakable, and his external appearance changed immediately. His clothing was unique—it was neither that of a fakir nor a renunciate. His appearance stood in between both paths, as if to embody unity in duality. He had established the eternal nirguṇa-bhakti. He became one with his true Self and gave up all identification with the body.

People from all eighteen varṇas came to him, and those who approached with sincere hearts received his grace, without him analyzing or judging them in any way. Still, worldly people mocked him, saying, "He has abandoned his religion completely and adopted some strange new path. He lives in comfort, disguising himself in odd garb."

Some said that he had become like this by chanting certain mantras, and that is why he had entered such a detached state. Others dismissed his deeds, claiming that the domed structures were what pleased him most. Indeed, both Hindus and Muslims became fortunate through his actions. But the question remained—who exactly had built these enclosures throughout the city? Then someone spoke up and replied, "Why do you criticize him meaninglessly? There was a real problem—people had no place to relieve themselves. And he found a brilliant solution."

In truth, women—especially the poor and helpless—would suffer for lack of privacy. No one gave them a place to go. So they blessed Nānak for his thoughtful service—though the wicked still mocked him for it. The minds of saints are deep and unfathomable. Their thoughts and actions do not arise in ordinary hearts. But the ignorant do not understand this—they simply speak ill without reflection. Nānak, however, was untouched by both praise and blame. His awareness was fixed on the Supreme, ever-seeing God. Even while dwelling in the body, he had gone beyond bodily consciousness. He paid no attention to

worldly slander. Just as a horse walks calmly past barking dogs, undisturbed in its stride, so too did Nānak move forward on his steady path. Just like the great sage Agastya, who paid no attention when the sea roared in mocking laughter before him, but remained calm and devoted in his silent worship—so too did Nānak stay fixed in his vow.

In this way, the waves of public ridicule rose and fell, but they could not shake the ocean of peace within him. He had utterly destroyed the pathways of lust and anger. His actions were astounding beyond imagination. Now at that very moment, all the local people of the region who had submitted to the Muslim ruler came and complained against Nānak. The wicked and vile king, full of malice, immediately summoned him.

They said, "Look, Nānak has abandoned the Hindu religion and adopted another path." Hearing this, the king swiftly sent messengers to instruct Nānak to return to his original dharma and publicly practice it again.

As soon as this was conveyed, the cruel and ignorant king—burning with rage—ordered Nānak to be arrested and sent him a warning. A message was then dispatched to his monastery, asking him to follow the state-sanctioned religion. But Nānak, undisturbed, sent a letter in return—one full of deep spiritual wisdom. That letter, called a sākī, carried truths that saints and seekers still reflect upon today.

Sākī: "A clay pot is made of the same earth, whether it's a vessel for sacred purposes or mundane use. When did Kabīr start chanting the Gāyatrī? When did Rohidās study the Purāṇas? Which Veda did Nāmdev recite to attain the divine? They all realized the Self by knowing the indwelling Lord."

"Dhana, a simple farmer, grew crops without sowing seeds. Sena, a barber of low caste, was graced by the Lord Himself. Even the sinner Ajamila, who named his son Nārāyaṇa in his final moments, was liberated. So false is the act done without God, and true is only remembrance of Hari. Nanak says: Only he is truly noble who remembers Hari."

Just as all pots are made of the same clay—pitchers, pans, or water-jars—when you look closely, you'll see that there is no essential difference between them. Likewise, among humans, the differences of caste—Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Śūdra, and others—are only names. In truth, all are expanded manifestations of the one divine Consciousness, and there is no duality in the heart of the wise. The names, ornaments, and external distinctions—crowns, earrings, armlets—may vary, but when seen through the eye of truth, they are all made of the same gold. Just as from a tiny banyan seed arise mighty branches and countless shoots, so too from the One Divine arises this manifold universe. The enlightened recognize all this as Brahman alone. The entire world is pervaded by Lord Viṣṇu—this is the sure proclamation of the Vedas. I have experienced this truth myself, and hence no dualistic thought arises in me. To those who take shelter at the Lord's lotus feet, all dharmas become fulfilled within. Countless devotees have been uplifted through the remembrance of His name alone.

Kabīr, born in a Muslim household, had no training in the Gāyatrī mantra. Yet by his loving remembrance of Śrī Rāma, he attained the complete form of Brahman. Rohidās, a humble cobbler, knew nothing of the scriptures or their meanings, yet through bhakti to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, he became a Vaiṣṇava and crossed the ocean of worldly life. Nāmdev was of the tailor caste and had no entitlement to recite the Vedas, yet he attained salvation through the singing of Hari's glories. Dhana, the farmer, harvested without planting and performed no rituals—but by sincere remembrance, he attained the Lord. Sena, a low-born barber, was once in dire trouble. The Lord Himself took on his form and served the king in his place. The great sinner Ajamila, though fallen, remembered Nārāyaṇa at the time of death and was instantly liberated. Those who act falsely are truly false. But those who remember the Lord—day and night—are superior to all.

When the Muslim king received this letter, his mind was filled with astonishment and reverence. Yet, seeking to test Nānak further, he gave in to wrath. He proclaimed, "I am the sovereign ruler! My word is final. Bring that man here!" He immediately dispatched a thousand Pathan soldiers, ordering them to seize and bring Nānak by force.

As soon as the order was given, those armed soldiers, well-equipped with swords and spears, marched swiftly to Nānak's monastery and surrounded it. But when they prepared to enter, a strange hesitation came upon them. They began to ponder in their minds—what would happen next? Sensing this, Nānak began to meditate on the power of Lord Viṣṇu's divine māyā. Then, a wondrous event unfolded. Suddenly, ten thousand celestial warriors appeared, all fully armed and armored, standing in radiant glory outside the monastery. They unleashed a torrential rain of arrows and weapons as if launched by mystic machines. The invading army, terrified by the sudden appearance of this divine host, fled in panic. The surviving Pathans returned to the king and reported the whole incident. They said, "We were about to seize Nānak, but suddenly ten thousand warriors appeared from nowhere and struck us down outside his monastery. It was a miracle!"

Upon hearing this astonishing report, the king was filled with deep remorse. He said, “Alas! I followed the foolish advice of wicked men and sought to torment a saint.” With humility, the Muslim king tied a scarf around his hands in surrender, came to Nānak’s monastery, and offered respectful obeisance. He said, “I am full of faults and have offended you at this moment. O Master of yoga, please forgive me. Grant me your divine protection. You have now established a third path,” the king continued. “Let this path of peace and devotion spread throughout the world.” Saying this, the king himself went to the temple without delay.

Having witnessed such supernatural power, the fame of Nānak spread far and wide. People of all castes and communities gathered around him, eager to receive his blessings and earn his grace. A wealthy merchant once built a grand monastery, providing abundant food and peace for all. Many disciples gathered in that place, but most of them were still inwardly attached to worldly life. Out of them, however, two stood apart—firm, fearless, and truly renounced. Their names were Sutrā and Mardānā.

Sutrā was one, and Mardānā the other, a devout disciple. With hearts full of repentance, they renounced the world completely, dedicating their bodies, minds, and all their wealth at the feet of their Satguru. Their minds never turned back to worldly affairs—their conviction was resolute. Understanding their Guru's intentions, they served him day and night. Whatever was needed, they would bring with eagerness. Their devotion earned them abundant grace.

But after some time, Guru Nānak felt the burden of name and fame growing heavy. He reflected: "This growing prestige must be discarded quickly." Though he had built an āśram and taken up the life of a teacher, he realized that worldly obligations increase when one tries to give them up—karma continues to yield its fruits."

With this realization, he decided to leave that place. He entrusted the monastery to Sutrā and took Mardānā with him on his journey. Nānak thought to himself, "In Mecca dwells the form of Lord Viṣṇu. The Muslims say it has been overturned. Let me go and witness the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha myself."

With this thought, the Guru and disciple began their journey. Along the way, they came across a mighty river, flooded and wild. Mardānā became deeply anxious. Nānak walked directly over the water, saying "Alakh Niranjan!" Mardānā, however, stood far behind, afraid, and pleaded, "Master, tell me how I can cross. I am terrified—I cannot swim!"

Seeing his disciple's fear, Nānak stopped in the middle of the river and said, "Call upon your Satguru sincerely, and the water shall not drown you." Mardānā obeyed, invoking the Guru's name with faith, and miraculously, the water only reached his ankles as he walked through the river. Nānak then turned and gently chided him, "You repeat ordinary mantras but do not truly call upon the Satguru. You must abandon those lesser practices."

But suddenly, the water rose to Mardānā's neck, and he cried, "I'm drowning! Master, save me!" Nānak looked back and said, "Sing the name of the Satguru with devotion. We live only for your sake." Mardānā instantly cried out, "Guru, Guru!" and safely reached the other shore.

Nānak then explained that the Guru's words must be followed with heart and soul. The fruit comes only when followed sincerely. They continued on, reaching the shore together. Mardānā acknowledged the greatness of the method his Guru had taught him.

Later, on the shore of the sea, they sat upon an island. In Mecca, in the Kaliyuga, the deity of Lord Viṣṇu had indeed been overturned. A grand mosque was constructed in that place, with a Muslim caretaker appointed. If a Hindu saint entered there, his life would be in danger.

They had desecrated the deity of Lord Viṣṇu and built a mosque over it. Even food was restricted—green grains were banned beyond Attock, and the ashes of Gurus were disposed of in wells. Along the rivers, bones had been driven into the earth. Nothing could be bought without cooked food. Such was the domination of the Yavanas. One might wonder—how

did Nānak manage to enter Mecca? The secret lies in the miraculous ways of a siddha-puruṣa. He entered Mecca in an invisible form and became manifest there discreetly.

When the Muslim caretaker saw Nānak in the mosque, he was astonished and asked, "Who are you? From where have you come? Tell us!"

Nānak replied, "I am the servant of Supreme Lord, who is the source from whom creation, preservation, and destruction arise. The source of Brahman Effulgence, the cause of all beings, who is the one beyond action, yet the doer of all. He transcend the three guṇas. He have manifested here, unannounced, for the welfare of the world. He is that eternal syllable, pervading all things—beyond illusion. For the sake of the world, He descended into this mortal realm. He is formless and beyond attributes, have taken form for the sake of his devotees. He is the life of the world, the One without a second."

Hearing this, the caretaker said, "You speak such lofty words. If you can show us a miracle, we shall believe your words to be true."

He added, "This very place once had the deity of Lord Viṣṇu, worshipped by Hindus. It was overturned by the Muslim ruler, and a mosque was built here. If you truly are who you say, then turn the deity upright again."

Hearing this challenge, Nānak began to praise Supreme Lord Viṣṇu: "Victory to You, O Lord who dwells in the ocean of milk! Husband of Lakṣmī, You alone pervade all three worlds. Victory to You, Lord of Hari and Hara! Uplifter of the fallen! There is no shelter in all creation apart from You. In every pore of Your body dwell countless universes—such is Your vast form! Yet for the sake of Your devotees, You assume a small, visible form. You are the source of creation, preservation, and dissolution. Even in this Kaliyuga, You conceal Yourself out of respect for the unrighteous. You appear to turn away from the wicked. But now, hearing our prayer, reveal Yourself and uplift the fallen!"

As Nānak offered this praise, the deity of Lord Viṣṇu miraculously rose and sat upright. It was a divine sight—Lord Śrīpati, dark-complexioned, youthful and delicate, with conch and discus in hand.

Nānak then offered mental worship with all proper rituals. Having had the blessed darśan, they swiftly departed.

Witnessing this miracle, the Muslim caretaker fell at Nānak's feet, trembling. He said, "If the king finds out that the deity rose because of a Hindu visitor, he will surely have us killed! You are indeed the dear servant of Supreme Lord. We accept the truth of your being, but please, we have one request. Kindly make the deity appear as it was before—overturned—so that we will not suffer punishment."

Nānak made no demands but humbly said, "Let the Lord's will be done." Then he requested the Lord to return to the previous state, and at once, the deity reclined once again.

Nānak then hinted at the future, saying, “For the sake of saints like Mardānā, the Lord will incarnate again as Kalki, restoring dharma and protecting the devotees.”

Now the faithless Yavanas were humbled, and the Lord once again began uplifting the meek and lowly, just as before. Hearing the heartfelt appeal of Nānak, the divine Viṣṇu deity swiftly returned to its original, upright position.

Having accomplished this wondrous act, the yogī Nānak promptly departed. Crossing the river on foot, he passed over the ocean with ease. As they journeyed onward, they came upon a mighty river, swollen with floodwaters. At that very place, a certain king and his army had been stranded. When the king beheld the divine sage Nānak, he felt deep reverence and surrendered himself fully at his feet.

In that moment, he folded a piece of paper into the shape of a small boat and, by the grace of Nānak, was able to cross the river with his entire army. Reaching the other side, the king approached the Master and humbly entreated, “Please grant me darśan of the Lord.”

To this, the yogī replied, “He whom you seek is beyond this material qualities and material form—He has the transcendental form, beyond the three guṇas, yet the Lord of all beings. O King, behold Him within all that moves and breathes. The Supreme Brahman is neither fair nor dark, neither blue nor golden. He is neither crimson nor pale. Beyond the seven colors, He remains untouched by material qualities. It is by His power that all creatures perform their actions. He alone awakens the inert, and thus He must be known as Śrīdhara—the true Self within all. By the power of that Supreme Self, your eyes see, your ears hear. Recognize Him within your own awareness—why do you search outside, digging in hollow places? It is by Him that fragrance is known to the nose, and taste to the tongue. That dark-hued Lord of all gods must be realized immediately within your own body as the Super Soul. The Lord pervades both the body and the universe. Apart from Him, there is no other sustaining power. Realize this deeply in your own being—there is no greater teaching than this.”

Hearing Nānak’s exalted words, the king bowed with great devotion and reverence. He said, “Your divine words have pierced my heart and left their deep imprint.”

Having said this, the king took his leave and returned to his kingdom. Nānak and Mardānā, with swift steps, resumed their journey along the sacred path. At that very moment, the crown jewel among yogīs—the empowered personality, whom people know as Gorakṣanātha—suddenly appeared before Nānak’s eyes. Seeing him, Nānak offered his salutations. Matsyendranātha’s disciple, Gorakṣanātha, then spoke: “You have already revealed your spiritual greatness to the world. Now I ask you to fulfill a certain task. During the grand pilgrimage gathering at Haridvāra, nearly four hundred thousand seekers will assemble. If you truly are a master among yogīs, then provide food for them all.”

Hearing these words from Gorakṣa, Nānak replied firmly, “Very well. Go ahead and invite everyone. Let all be welcomed.”

Wanting to test this divine power, Gorakṣanātha set out for Haridvāra. What Nānak accomplished there was a marvel—listen, O dear and faithful ones.

At that auspicious time, four hundred thousand pilgrims had indeed gathered at Haridvāra. In secret form, Nānak arrived quickly and satisfied each and every one with delicious food. All the siddhis—the miraculous powers—served him willingly. He fulfilled everyone’s wishes with the food of their choice.

Later, Gorakṣanātha returned and began inviting the pilgrims for meals. The people exclaimed, “Gorakṣanātha, just a moment ago, a great yogī named Nānak appeared and fed us all with the very food we desired. He has now departed on pilgrimage.”

Hearing this report, Matsyendranātha’s disciple was astonished. At that moment, Nānak revealed himself again and offered his respects to Gorakṣa. They met in deep affection, and Gorakṣanātha offered profuse praise. He said, “Such a perfect spiritual form as yours cannot be seen anywhere in the three worlds. All the signs that mark the great personality, and all the characteristics of a true yogī, are manifest in your very being. Now I am completely convinced.”

After offering this praise, Gorakṣanātha soared into the sky and departed. Nānak, along with his disciple, returned swiftly to his own maṭha. Just as the Lord performs divine līlās, so too do the perfected yogīs display their powers. By manifesting various siddhis, they demonstrate the hidden splendor of divine will. Whether a devotee or a yogī, when one displays such wondrous miracles, his fame spreads far and wide. New traditions arise from such realized beings. The spiritual path of Nānak—the path of detachment—is still followed in those regions in great numbers. Having instructed the people, he inspired even the dull and ignorant to take up remembrance of the Lord.

Listening to the stories of saints purifies even the gravest of sins. Pleased by such devotion, the Lord grants liberation and establishes the soul in Vaikuṇṭha. He who is the compassionate protector of the meek, the eternal, indestructible Lord—the beloved of Rukmiṇī—takes form in the hearts of the wise and speaks forth the stories of His saints.

Blessed is this divine scripture, Bhakti Līlāmṛta! Its very hearing fulfills all desires. O tender-hearted, devoted soul—this sweet eleventh chapter is now complete.

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Chapter 12

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Śrī Gaṇeśa)

The Supreme Being is of the nature of eternal Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss—boundless and infinite. His divine manifestations are countless. Neither sight nor hearing can grasp His limit. Then how can one such as I, steeped in worldly nature, dare to describe Him?

Just as when the clouds pour down upon the earth, none can count the number of raindrops that fall, nor can one tally the countless blades of grass that spring from the soil. Likewise, the waves of the ocean—ever rising and receding, day and night—are beyond reckoning. Who can measure the vastness of the sky? Whose hands can span it? So too are the manifestations of the Lord—beyond number, limitless in form and glory. Whosoever, by love or enmity, comes into contact with a true saint, even he is transformed; his inner nature becomes pure, and he attains liberation, merging with the Lord.

In the preceding chapter, it was narrated how Sant Nānak, moved by devotion, travelled to Mecca and beheld the divine form of Lord Viṣṇu there. Later, he encountered the sage Gorakṣanātha.

Now, O devout listeners, hear another sweet and complete story: There was a great Vaiṣṇava named Rohidās, immersed in devotion to Lord Viṣṇu. In deep meditation, he fashioned a deity of the Lord using leather—the material of his own caste—forming an deity of the dark-hued Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, four-armed and adorned with conch and discus. The Lord stood before him, smiling and radiant. To behold Him was to forget all bodily consciousness. This divine form, the embodiment of bliss, was worshipped with all due rites and offerings.

In front of that sacred deity of Gopāla stood a pancāyatana—the fivefold altar of Śālagrāma, Gaṇapati, Śiva, Brahmā, the Sun, and Śakti—arranged lovingly by Rohidās. Though he revered all, Rohidās declared himself above all a devotee of Kṛṣṇa, and his devotion was purely Vaiṣṇava in character. These teachings reached the ears of the great saint Kabīr. Kabīr, a devout worshipper of Rāma, was a serene soul, full of love, steadfastness, and renunciation. He had subdued his senses through penance, just as the chataka bird drinks only rain directly from the heavens and knows no other water, or like the cakora bird who sees only the moon as its nourishment.

Kabīr's heart clung only to Śrī Rāma. Though many deities existed, he cast no glance toward them. Upon hearing of Rohidās, such a steadfast soul, he went one day and met him unexpectedly. These two souls—both renounced and full of Vaiṣṇava devotion—came together. Seeing the deity of Gopāla, Kabīr offered a respectful prostration in goodwill. But when the time of worship came, Kabīr observed from afar, his lotus-like eyes watching. Yet he did not approach, instead sitting quietly, his heart amazed.

Seeing this, Rohidās gently questioned, “You have come to the temple of the Lord, yet in your heart you hold back? You proclaim yourself a Vaiṣṇava and yet do not bow before the manifest form of the Lord, the lover of His devotees?”

Kabīr replied, “Aside from Śrī Rāma, I do not accept any other deity’s worship. Such is the command of my Guru. You have crafted a form of leather, filled it with cotton, and you worship it with love. But how can I bow before such an deity?”

Hearing these words, Rohidās responded firmly, “What object have you ever known that exists apart from leather? The body itself is but a covering of the five elements, wrapped in skin. If you disparage this leather deity of the Lord, then your argument turns upon itself. All living beings—those born of eggs, of wombs, or from the earth—are all wrapped in skin. Yet within them dwells the same Supreme Lord, Viṣṇu, the Lord of the universe, as the Super Soul. Consider the instruments like kettledrums, conches, and mṛdaṅgas—they are covered in leather and yet they produce the sacred Nāda Brahma, the sound divine, praised by the scriptures. The royal elephant, adorned in silks and ornaments, bears the king himself. Yet all are covered in leather, and the king himself beholds everything with eyes of skin. The sacred cow, made of leather, gives pure milk. People drink it joyfully, drawn out by hands of leather and tasted by the tongue of the same substance. O devout ones, consider deeply—this Gopāla, your Kṛṣṇa, is present in this leather temple. He pervades all things, untouched and pure.”

At this, Kabīr grew agitated. He replied, “Śrī Rāma is the life of the universe; this is declared loudly in the Purāṇas. Your Kṛṣṇa was born in Dvāpara Yuga, the child of Nanda. He played among cowherds and displayed his strength only in jest! My Rāma is of the Solar Dynasty, born in the house of Daśaratha, the sovereign of Ayodhyā, beloved of sages like Sanaka and Sanātana.”

To this, Rohidās countered, “I too have heard the stories of Rāma. He chased a golden deer and lost Sītā. Wandering in sorrow, he wept in the forests, crying before trees and stones. Is this the sovereign of your heart?”

Kabīr replied, “Your Kṛṣṇa, the garlanded one, was tied to a mortar and wept like a child beside his mother. But my Rāma, the embodiment of Supreme Reality, wandered the forests in love, seeking Sītā, only to establish dharma on earth.”

Rohidās questioned again, “O devout soul, if your Rāma was truly the sovereign of all, then why did he assemble an army of monkeys and wander through forests? My Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, seeing the deep love of Yaśodā, allowed Himself to be bound, showing the glory of the avatar. When Indra loosed the wrathful rains upon Gokula, it was He who lifted Govardhana with a single finger and protected all beneath.”

Kabīr, still firm, retorted, “If Kṛṣṇa feared not the Kali age, why then did he flee from the touch of the wicked Jarāsandha? You boast of his lifting mountains, but Rāma built a bridge

over the ocean with the help of monkeys! He, Rāma, built a causeway of great stones; your Kṛṣṇa simply lifted one hill. What then is the greater glory?"

Thus, their dialogue continued, attracting the attention of divine beings. The gods assembled in the skies, filling the heavens with their celestial chariots, the sound of conches, and praises of the Lord.

Both saints were complete in bhakti, jnāna, and vairāgya. Their devotion was one-pointed, their minds unwavering. Like the sun and moon, each shone with his own splendor, though of differing temperaments. Just as Śiva and Viṣṇu are seen with different forms but are equally divine, so too were these two saints, each incomparable in his path. The thoughts and perspectives of such great souls may appear distinct to the world, and so Rohidās's form of worship did not appeal to Kabīr's heart.

Let us continue now, O devout ones, for Kabīr then proclaimed to Rohidās, "My Rāma, the best among the Raghus, is greater! When Nīla, the Lord Śiva, consumed poison, his body burned with heat. But by chanting Rāma's name, his entire being was cooled. The hunter Vālhā, uttering 'mara, mara', was transformed into a great sage. His fame now pervades the three worlds. Countless bound souls have been liberated upon this earth by the name of Rāma."

Hearing this, Rohidās replied, "If Rāma truly brought peace, why then did Daśaratha die of sorrow when Rāma departed for the forest? Having caused such grief to his own father, what would he not do to others?"

These words stirred Kabīr's anger. He could not tolerate such criticism of Rāma. He said, "O ignorant one! You insult Rāma while worshipping that deceitful Kṛṣṇa. Recall how it was foretold that Kṛṣṇa would take birth in the womb of Devakī, and would slay demons in due time. Upon hearing this, Kaṁsa was filled with fear and imprisoned Devakī and Vasudeva. And what comfort did your Kṛṣṇa ever give to his parents? Born in prison, he fled to Gokula out of fear. He drank poison from Pūtanā's breast, killing her while still a babe. You call this a perfect avatar, and yet he committed the sin of slaying a woman in infancy."

Rohidās replied, "Did not your Rāma disfigure Śūrpaṇakhā and slay Tāṭakā himself? How could Rāma, born in the Solar Dynasty, engage in such acts?"

And so their dispute intensified, but at last the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha took note. He instructed Gaṇapati, "Both these devotees—Kabīr and Rohidās—are dear to Me. But their pride in their respective paths has led them to quarrel. Go quickly and judge fairly between them, and bring peace."

Receiving the command, Gaṇeśa, the son of Pārvatī, promptly appeared in Rohidās's temple in a divine form—large-bellied, elephant-faced, one-tusked, riding a mouse, His whole body anointed with red vermilion. He stood between them and heard their entire dispute. Then

siding with Rohidās, Gaṇapati spoke, “Truly, I find Kṛṣṇa’s worship to be full of deep meaning.”

Kabīr, incensed, retorted, “Who are you to judge us? You, with your huge belly, riding on a rat—depart at once! We are steadfast Vaiṣṇavas! We do not accept your verdict. Rohidās is corrupt—he mixes deities in his worship! He flatters you with offerings for bribes! Go back your way—no sweetmeats await you here!”

Hearing such harsh words, Gaṇapati remained silent. But the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha then turned to Sun God and said, “Go now, disguised as a brāhmaṇa, and render a final judgment between the two.”

And so, Sun God Himself appeared in the form of a brāhmaṇa, shining like the sun, and declared: “In truth, the devotion of Rohidās touches my very heart.”

Kabīr, still burning with intensity, turned to brāhmaṇa and cried, “Why have you come at this juncture? Your very being is steeped in duality and division. Return whence you came—your presence is not needed here. You shed your light equally upon all,” he continued, “and yet there is deception in your depths. I have discerned it fully. Though like the moon You appear cool and serene, there is a blemish upon Your form. Just as sunlight appears pure yet harbors distinction within, so too does duality reside deep in you. Lord Rama apperead in your dynasty and now you extol the glory of Gopāla, the cowherd boy, dismissing Rāma’s supreme devotion.”

Hearing Kabīr’s sharp rebuke, the brāhmaṇa form of Lord Viṣṇu—disguised as Vāsaramuṇi—fell silent, unable to find any fitting response. Thus, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, seeing that Kabīr would not relent, turned next to the Divine Mother, Ambā.

He instructed, “O Devī, You must now go swiftly to those two and explain the truth that brings peace.”

Then, seated upon her lion mount, the resplendent Goddess Ambā appeared and arrived at the abode of Rohidās, listening to the entire dialogue unfolding there. Taking the side of the devotee of Kṛṣṇa, she openly bore witness: “Rohidās is supremely devoted. His heart is fixed firmly on the Supreme Brahman.”

Yet, when she uttered these words, Kabīr scoffed and responded scornfully, “We are fearless Vaiṣṇavas! Who are You to answer us? You long for vermillion, blood offerings, and sacrifices! Your ways are those of ancient darkness. You demand goats and animals in sacrifice—how could we ever accept your judgment?”

At this, the Divine Mother herself fell silent. She had no answer, no thought arose within her to offer in reply. Seeing even the Devī defeated by Kabīr’s defiant stance, the Supreme Lord—Devaadhi-Deva, the God of gods—then dispatched Śiva as the final arbiter.

He declared, “Both Kabīr and Rohidās are My beloved Vaiṣṇava devotees. Yet their fierce dispute troubles Me. One is a complete devotee of Rāma, the other of Kṛṣṇa. They are locked in a mighty conflict. Go quickly, and reconcile them.”

Hearing this divine command, Śūlapāṇi—Lord Śiva, wielder of the trident—descended to the abode of Rohidās. Appearing with ten arms and five faces, His divine form became visible to both saints.

Seeing Him, Kabīr said, “You are the Lord of Kailāsa, and this Rohidās worships an deity of Gopāla. Tell us then, what do You say in this matter?”

Śiva replied, “Lord Nārāyaṇa, the resident of Vaikuṇṭha, has sent me to end this quarrel and establish friendship between you both.”

Recalling that divine vision and instruction from above, Lord Śiva spoke with love and conviction: “In truth, Rohidās’s devotion is genuine and pure.”

Kabīr, however, was still not appeased. His anger flared again as he responded, “Śiva, have You not become a yogi, lost to the world in Your ways? Constantly You chew hemp and herbs, playing amidst the ashes of cremation grounds. What do you know of proper worship and devotion? You consumed the poison Hālāhala,” he continued, “and it was only by chanting the Name of Rāma that you were cooled. Yet now you seem to forget that entirely and speak nonsense. You praise Rohidās, who maintains a pancāyatana shrine in his house, mixing deities in worship! And now You speak in his favor, likely won over by bribes or flattery.”

At this, Kabīr’s speech became heated. He condemned even Lord Śiva, as the gods seated in their celestial chariots looked on and burst into astonished laughter. Everywhere, there were shouts of “Victory! Victory!” echoing in the heavens.

Śiva, now silent, reflected within himself. “Who among the three worlds,” he thought, “can answer such harsh words?”

He finally spoke, “I myself am a worshipper of Śrī Rāma—this is known. Yet I too have lost control of my tongue in this moment and said more than I ought. What can I say now?”

Thus, burdened with remorse, the blue-throated Lord grew quiet, listening silently to the continuing dialogue of Rohidās and Kabīr.

One praised Śrī Rāma as supreme and unceasingly worshipped Him; the other honored Kṛṣṇa as the highest and served Him always. Both were unwavering, steadfast devotees—one like Mount Meru, the other like Mount Mandara. One might call them like the moon and the sun, each shining differently, yet equal in power. One was like Vāsuki, the serpent that encircles the earth; the other like Airāvata, carrying the burden of the world. One could compare them to Śukrācārya and Bṛhaspati—one the teacher of the demons, the other of the gods—both revered. So too were Kabīr and Rohidās—complete in devotion, wisdom,

and renunciation—yet their forms of worship appeared distinct. And that difference became the cause of this divine conflict. Were they like Nārada and Tumbura—great minstrels of divine praise? Or perhaps like Garuḍa and Hanumān—two divine servants of the Lord, one winged, the other monkey-formed?

Their minds, though deeply spiritual, could not comprehend one another. And thus, the world fell into confusion. The Lord Śrī Hari, the enchanter of all, decided: "I have sent mediators, great and wise, yet the dispute remains unresolved. I must go myself and resolve this. For when the axe and the carpenter quarrel, no mediator can reconcile them. They destroy everything they touch. But when the needle and thread intervene, garments are stitched and union is restored. I am the Soul of the universe, the very life of all beings, yet I am bound by the love of my devotees. I shall go to them, appear before them both, and establish harmony."

Thus spoke Śārṅgadhara—the wielder of the bow—before mounting His Garuḍa and descending swiftly. His form was dark as a raincloud, His lotus-like eyes radiated divine love, and His face shone with incomparable beauty. Four-armed was this vision of Śrī Hari, bearing conch and discus in His hands. His earrings sparkled like fish in gold, shaped like crocodiles and glinting with celestial light.

In this manner, Lord Cakrapāṇi, the wielder of the discus, arrived at the dwelling of Rohidās. At that very moment, celestial blue lotuses showered down, and the gods above rejoiced, offering their divine blessings.

To protect his dear devotee Kabīr, the Lord Himself, Raghunandan Śrīrāma, descended. In His graceful form, He bore a bow and arrow in His hand, ready to shield Kabīr with divine might.

As Kabīr opened his eyes, he beheld before him the very deity of his heart's devotion—Śrīrāma standing there in divine splendour. A wave of deep emotion surged through him; his heart overflowed with all eight forms of bhakti-bhāva. Overwhelmed, he rushed forth and embraced the consort of Sītā with tears of bliss.

Lying prostrate, Kabīr pressed his entire being upon the lotus feet of Śrīrāma, his heart filled with gratitude and divine fulfilment. "My desires have borne fruit," he exclaimed, "Blessed is this hour, this sacred day!"

Beholding Śrīrāma with his own eyes, Kabīr's gaze could not shift away. But lo! A wondrous miracle unfolded—dear listeners, hearken to this sacred mystery revealed before the eyes of saints.

In a matter of moments, the form of Śrīrāma transformed. The same divine being now assumed the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa! The bow and arrow disappeared, and in their place, the sweet flute appeared in His hands.

The crown of Rāma vanished instantly. A peacock feather now adorned His head. He stood there charmingly, with flute at His lips, anklets chiming as He gently danced. Kabīr looked on in astonishment and joy.

As this form of Kṛṣṇa revealed itself, Rohidās approached with reverence and clasped the Lord's feet. "Blessed is this day," he declared, "for I have seen Hṛṣīkeśa face to face!"

In that divine moment, both Kabīr and Rohidās, their hearts brimful with devotion, embraced the Lord with their heart-lotuses. They proclaimed, "Let us cast away all notions of duality and live in the play of divine unity!"

The Lord then revealed, "The names Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, though different in form, are one in essence. Both have manifested to perform their respective līlās, but the underlying reality is eternally one and indivisible. Just as Aparṇā and Pārvatī are the same Goddess, and Nīlakaṇṭha and Kailāsapati are the same Śiva—so too are Rāma and Kṛṣṇa one and the same. Meditate on them as such. Whether Garuḍa or the King of Birds, whether the ocean or the treasure of gems it holds—so too are Gopāla and Rāmacandra, both one and inseparable. Just as Indra and the all-encompassing sky, or the holy waters of all tīrthas—so are Rāmacandra and Gopāla. Their form is but one, though called by many names."

As the Lord, reclining on Śeṣa, thus expounded this truth, Kabīr and Rohidās both fell at His lotus feet. All sense of difference, of duality between the forms, vanished entirely from their hearts. Seeing this divine play, the celestials who had gathered returned to their abodes, while Śeṣaśāyī disappeared from sight, yet continued to dwell eternally in the hearts of His devotees.

Indeed, the indwelling Lord of the Universe now made His home in the hearts of Kabīr and Rohidās, bestowing upon them the joy of unbroken divine union. And both devotees exclaimed together, "Blessed indeed is this day!"

The Lord had orchestrated this entire event to remove doubts and reveal the truth—thus He had granted them His direct audience, revealing Himself as Jagajjīvana, the Life of the Universe.

When the moment of departure approached, Rohidās once again clung to the Lord's lotus feet. But Kabīr gently lifted him up and held him close, embracing him with the warmth of true brotherhood. Then, after preparing the sanctified meal, the devotees offered it to the Lord and served it to the assembled saints with love. For mouth purification, they offered sacred tulasī leaves, imbued with deep devotion. After seeking permission from Rohidās, Kabīr departed for Vārāṇasī. In his heart, he always held the form of Śrīrāma, and thus he walked on, immersed in divine joy and love.

Before departing, Kabīr gave one last teaching to Rohidās: "Never worship any other deities within the Śālagrāma stone except the one, all-pervading Lord Viṣṇu. There are those who

worship the Bāṇa (symbol of Śakti) or Sūryakānta stones as deities. These are misleading and steeped in delusion. Such practices are not to be followed if the tradition is to endure. Worship of any deity apart from Viṣṇu must be known as misguided devotion—such is the mutual understanding we have both attained. It is through this resolve that swift liberation has been granted. So now, be ever alert in your heart. Never worship any other deity apart from Viṣṇu. With this firm determination, Rohidās once again fell at Kabīr's feet."

To this day, in that very region, the Vaiṣṇavas worship only Śālagrāma, their minds fixed solely upon the Lord, unwavering in their single-minded devotion. Thus, Kabīr departed to Vārāṇasī, while Rohidās returned home. Yet the form of Śrī Viṣṇu ever remained in his heart, day and night, in constant inner worship.

At this point, the listeners, curious and filled with wonder, posed a question to the narrator with reverence: "How did a cobbler like Rohidās attain such divine vision? What kind of austerity did he perform to gain the Lord's darśan? Please tell us clearly the account of his previous births. Why was a Vaiṣṇava hero born in such a lowly caste? What was the reason behind this birth?"

Hearing this earnest question from the noble-hearted, the speaker joyfully began the tale. In earlier times, there lived the great yati, Śrī Rāmānanda Svāmī, a preeminent master and teacher. Once, he initiated a brāhmaṇa brahmacārī into the sampradāya. To the disciple, he gave the humble service of going door to door, collecting flour for preparing food in the monastery. Although food gained through begging was considered impure by certain scriptural standards, when it is accepted with pure devotion for service, it is not condemned by true sādhakas. Even if food is received from just one house, it should not be hoarded selfishly. The Sadguru had instituted this discipline, and the brāhmaṇa obeyed it faithfully. After collecting flour from various homes, the disciple would cook meals in the monastery. When Rāmānanda felt hunger, the disciple would bring the prepared meal while meditating on the Lord of the Universe. Having first performed mānasa pūjā, the disciple would offer the food to the Lord as naivedya, and only then would he partake of the prasāda, content in heart. Thus passed many days in sacred routine, until one day, an unexpected obstacle arose. While the disciple was out in the town collecting alms, a heavy downpour began. Taking shelter by the shop of a merchant, he hesitated to beg further. Doubt and worry crept into his heart. The merchant noticed and said, "This noble brāhmaṇa has stood here for hours. Let me quickly give him provisions for both himself and his Guru."

Gratefully accepting the offering, the brāhmaṇa returned to the monastery and prepared the meal with care. He served it in the traditional vessel for naivedya. That day, although Rāmānanda performed his mānasa pūjā as usual, the Lord did not accept the offering. When he asked the disciple what had happened, the disciple admitted the truth with fear and humility, "Today, due to the rain, I could not go from house to house. A merchant gave me the flour, and I used it for the offering…"

Rāmānanda replied, “The Lord of Vaikuṇṭha does not partake of impure food. Because the offering was obtained in violation of our discipline, Śrī Hari did not accept it.”

Having prepared the food with utmost care and devotion, the offering was laid out truthfully before the Lord. But lo! The tale took a turn—when Rāmānanda learned that a brahmacārī disciple had secretly consumed food from a householder’s offering, he grew wrathful. He declared a curse upon the errant student, proclaiming, “Without informing us, you partook in food prepared for trade, and thus you shall fully endure the birth of a cobbler! Let this stand as truth!”

And so, the brahmacārī was cursed and fell at his Guru’s feet, pleading for forgiveness. But the Guru, firm in righteousness, said, “Even so, by the strength of your devotion to Viṣṇu, you shall still become a true bhakta. The Lord shall grant you divine vision. Through you, the ancient path of bhakti shall be restored and made firm again.”

Thus declared Rāmānanda. The brahmacārī, grief-stricken, lay prostrate at his Guru’s feet. Not many days passed before he was stricken with a severe fever and soon gave up his mortal frame, remembering the Lord with each breath. And by the mysterious workings of karma, he was born in the house of a cobbler. No sooner had the nine months passed than the infant emerged from the womb. His mother called to him lovingly, but the child refused to suckle. Word of this strange child was soon brought to Rāmānanda by his disciples.

They said, “The one you cursed, O Master, has taken birth in a cobbler's home, but he refuses to nurse from his mother.” Hearing this, the noble Yati hastened to the cobbler's dwelling. Standing outside the humble abode, Rāmānanda called the child to be brought before him. And the Guru addressed the infant, saying, “Having now received a body according to your past deeds, accept this birth as sacred. Begin your remembrance of Śrī Hari from this very moment.”

As if awakened by divine command, the child smiled and, turning to his mother, suckled her milk for the very first time. Thus was his course corrected, though he had fallen from yoga. With each passing day he grew, radiant in his devotion, skilled in his humble craft, yet never attached to it. Though living amidst untouchables, he constructed a separate hut, purified it daily, and installed a tulasī plant and a sacred courtyard which gleamed from constant cleaning. He would not engage in worldly duties without first bathing. His tongue constantly repeated the name of the Lord, and he served saints and noble devotees with reverence. To the Vaiṣṇavas who came to his humble dwelling, he offered ingredients for cooking and his own pots to prepare food. He would then feed them at his own place. He worked with coloured leather, skillfully mending the sandals of pilgrims and travellers. To many he gave new footwear without charge, doing so as an offering of service.

Despite living simply and withdrawn, one day he set out on pilgrimage to Kāśī. In that sacred city, a certain renunciate Vaiṣṇava happened upon his temple. Seeing the noble Rohidās, he requested, “Give me a sandal quickly, for I must resume my journey.”

But Rohidās gently refused, saying, “I ask not for payment. I only seek grace. If you are going to Kāśī, then bow to Mother Gaṅgā on my behalf. Take this single sandal as an offering from me, and when you reach the banks of Bhāgīrathī, offer it with love, along with this tulasī leaf.”

The pilgrim agreed and departed for Kāśī. As he bathed in the Gaṅgā, he remembered Rohidās and cast the sandal into the river. And behold! The daughter of Viṣṇu, Gaṅgā Devī herself, caught it in her hand. Accepting it with joy, she placed it to her heart and, in return, gave a radiant golden bracelet to the devotee, saying, “This is for Rohidās, the devotee of Lord Viṣṇu. Give it to him with my blessings.”

A voice rose from the waters, astonishing the pilgrim. The bracelet shone like a jewel crafted by Brahmā himself. Taking it with reverence, the pilgrim returned to Rohidās and said, “Mother Gaṅgā was pleased by your devotion. She accepted your offering and sent this prasād to you with love.”

Seeing the gift, Rohidās bowed and said, “The river which springs from the lotus feet of Viṣṇu has sent me this blessing. I shall worship it in my sanctum.” At night, the bracelet glowed like a lamp. Yet Rohidās held no pride, his heart unmoved by material wealth. In the company of pure-hearted Vaiṣṇavas, he remained content.

One day, to feed the visiting saints, he lacked the necessary supplies. Having no other means, he gave the golden bracelet to a goldsmith to sell and use the money for cooking. But alas! The goldsmith was wicked and cunning. He went straight to the royal court and showed the bracelet, saying, “This priceless ornament was stolen from me by Rohidās. It must be returned—or a pair made anew.”

The Muslim officer, hearing the falsehood, summoned Rohidās. “Return the other bracelet,” he commanded, “or face punishment.”

But Rohidās calmly replied, “That ornament was not stolen. It was sent to me by Bhāgīrathī herself. I gave it to the goldsmith only because I had no food to serve the saints.”

Still, the ruler did not believe him and threatened him again. Rohidās then said, “If you allow me to return to my temple, I shall prove the truth. If I cannot produce its pair from the Gaṅgā, then let me bear the punishment.”

The king permitted it, and Rohidās hastened home. In his shrine, he prayed fervently to the Mother of Rivers, extolling her greatness and pleading for her grace.

Remembering the lotus feet of Lord Viṣṇu with deep concentration, he sat in silence. And lo! In the water vessel near his altar, the Gaṅgā appeared—radiant, pure, and divine. The king, who had followed in secret, was astonished to behold her.

From the waters, a hand emerged holding the exact matching bracelet. When the king tried to compare it with the first one, the royal bracelet mysteriously opened on its own and leapt into the hand of Bhāgīrathī, while she looked on with compassion.

This wondrous event vanished as suddenly as it had come. The king, overwhelmed with shame, ran to fall at Rohidās' feet and cried, "Forgive me! I wrongfully tormented you."

Thus, the divine truth was revealed. The humble and sincere words of saints never go in vain, for they speak only what is pure and inspired by the Lord. He alone knows all—Lord Śrī Hari, the beloved of Rukmiṇī.

To illustrate the heights of true devotion and the purity of heart required on the path of bhakti, this episode was revealed through the Lord's own play, using the king as an instrument to unfold its mystery.

Thus concludes the twelfth chapter of the sacred text Bhakta Līlāmṛta, a stream of nectar for all loving devotees. Let those with hearts steeped in divine affection partake in its sweetness.

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Chapter 13

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Śrī Gaṇeśa)

All glory to Thee, O Friend of the helpless, O Consort of Rukmiṇī! Ocean of compassion, Beloved of the devotees, ever eager to uplift the downtrodden—Thou art the Supreme Lord, O Pāṇḍuraṅga! Thou art the Lord of all auspiciousness, the Master who transcends all inauspiciousness, O Hṛṣīkeśa! Thou art the Liberator of the universe, the Perfect Supreme, robed in the garment of immortality, the World Teacher. Victory unto Thee, O Mover of consciousness, O Embodied Spirit of Divine Light! Thou art the inner flame, O Madhusūdana—beyond Māyā, treasure-house of all virtues, simultaneously transcendent and immanent, the ocean of bliss. Thou delightest in fulfilling the tasks of Thy devotees, hastening to their aid in times of distress. Thou revealest Thy divine ease before the eyes of men, and Thy sacred fame flows like the holy Gaṅgā. With deep trust in Thee, I have commenced the nectar-like chronicle of the lives of Thy devotees. O Lord, lead this sacred work to completion, steering it clear of obstacles and missteps. Yet, my mind is dull, my intellect slow. I do not fully grasp the meanings or connections. How then shall I inscribe these sacred words in this scripture? I know not the way. But once the Omnipotent takes up the task, who shall hinder its progress? Just as iron, when touched by the philosopher's stone, transforms into gold of great worth—So too, through Thy grace, O Beloved of Rukmiṇī, these words shall attain the purity of the Vedic utterances. Otherwise, I am but a wretched, ignorant soul, known thus to all. Now I realize fully within my heart: Thou art verily the hidden thread that weaves all. Therefore, O Giver of Fearlessness, make me the instrument through which the lives of Thy devotees may be sung.

In the previous chapter, there unfolded a beautiful story—of Kabīr, the great devotee of Rāma, and Rohidās, the glorious servant of Kṛṣṇa. A sacred dialogue blossomed between them. Now begins the tale of Śrī Eknāth of Paithan, who was none other than the dear servant of Lord Viṣṇu Himself, manifesting among men. Let the noble hear this sweet narration with joy. Bhānudās, the foremost among devotees, once brought the deity of Pāṇḍuraṅga to his land. His son, adorned with virtuous qualities, was named Cakrapāṇi. To Cakrapāṇi was born a luminous son named Sūryanārāyaṇa, radiant with the light of knowledge. His wife, a noble lady named Rukmiṇī, was adorned with all auspiciousness. Into the womb of this Rukmiṇī descended the servant of Supreme Brahman Himself—Eknāth, the incarnate World Teacher, appearing for the welfare of all beings in this age of Kali.

In his very infancy, both mother and father passed away. Yet his grandfather, the noble Cakrapāṇi, lovingly raised and protected him. With both grandparents alive, they poured boundless affection upon the child, finding joy in his divine play. His very being radiated virtue, and their hearts rejoiced in him. Even as a young boy, Eknāth showed no fondness for worldly games. He would arrange pebbles and play as if offering worship, adorning them with flowers in devotion. He would carry a ladle upon his shoulder, mimicking the sacred

rituals, and with innocent, babbling speech, he would call upon the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha. When any Haridās chanted the Lord's kīrtan, Eknāth would hear and immediately repeat the words with love, dancing joyfully in divine ecstasy. Seeing the depth of his pure devotion, the Lord Himself manifested amidst the stones. The God of Lakṣmī, hungry for bhakti, took residence near this devotee's home. Eknāth would ceaselessly chant: "Rāma! Kṛṣṇa! Hari Govinda! Acyuta! Ānanda-kanda!"—these sacred names, he would utter with joy, for he was verily the Jagadguru in disguise.

Taking up a small stick and a tattered cloth as a flag, he would lift them upon his shoulder and declare, "I am setting off to visit Pāṇḍharpur today!"

Such divine signs in his early childhood brought great contentment to his elders. He constantly uttered the name "Rāma Rāma" without ever missing a moment. While other children pursued worldly play, he was absorbed always in divine remembrance. Eknāth was unlike any other child in every way. Whatever little he was given, he accepted with contentment, never demanding more. The marks of his future greatness were already visible.

Cakrapāṇi would say to his wife, "Bhānudās was truly our father. He had once worshipped the deity of Pāṇḍuraṅga with deep devotion. And Viṭṭhala, pleased by his service, had once asked Bhānudās to request a boon. The saint replied, "May your great devotee take birth in my lineage—I desire no other gift."

Hearing this, Rukmiṇī's consort assented. That very boon has now taken form as Eknāth. Thus, this child is indeed that divine servant of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga. Rukmiṇī too affirmed with certainty, "These are no ordinary infant's traits. Were his parents alive, they would surely have realized the truth upon seeing his divine radiance."

Speaking thus, memories of their own son overwhelmed them. Emotion surged, and tears flowed from their eyes. Yet regaining composure, they rejoiced: "If we are spared such calamity again, surely our lineage shall be uplifted and our afterlife secured."

Thus comforted, they raised their grandson with affection. At the age of six, he was initiated into sacred vows, observing them with heartfelt sincerity. He obeyed the instructions of the family preceptor without deviation. He performed the tri-sandhyā daily, in perfect accordance with dharma. He followed strict purity, cleansing with earth and water, never eating without bathing first, nor speaking during meals. He would listen to learned Brāhmaṇas chanting the scriptures and take up the Paavamāna mantras, quickly committing them to memory with no strain. His grandfather would teach him rituals like piśācalīpa—these too, he grasped effortlessly, as if he already knew them.

Eknāth's conduct was extraordinary; worldly life held no allure for him. Born in a family of Vaiṣṇavas, he lived in full accordance with their noble traditions. Being of a virtuous lineage, he was gentle and well-mannered. All revered him, and even Time was favorable to him—there was no sorrow, not even in dreams. He whose mind does not sorrow is alone to be called a true devotee of Viṣṇu. Where bhakti flows, there all accomplishments follow as

blessings. Let these words firmly stand as a testament to the matchless state of Eknāth. His love for chanting the name of Rāma filled people with wonder and admiration.

Though young in age, the boy's mind was ever detached from worldly pleasures. There was no laughter of ordinary jest in his demeanor—rather, his joy lay in the listening of the Purāṇas and the contemplation of the Divine. When he recited verses, their deeper meanings naturally unfolded. Even while elaborating on difficult spiritual truths, no gap was seen between thought and word. The learned brāhmaṇas themselves acknowledged his insight and clarity. Listening to him speak, the noble brāhmaṇas felt a great inner delight. Some among them remarked, "This child is no ordinary soul. He must be a yogabhraṣṭa—one who had advanced far on the path of yoga in a previous birth. Proficient in Vedānta, he has surely descended in human form to uplift the world."

One day, in solitude, Eknāth approached a learned paṇḍit and posed a subtle spiritual question. Upon hearing it, the brāhmaṇa was struck speechless. He said, "This knowledge we possess has come only from traditional learning, not from direct experience. We have merely memorized the etymology and exposition of the Purāṇas. But your question comes from an inner realisation—its depth is without compare. To the eye, you appear as a mere child, but just as the ocean lies hidden beyond the shallow shore, so too your understanding far surpasses ours. In comparison to your knowledge, ours is meagre and peripheral, O Eknātha! Just as a glow-worm's light vanishes before the radiance of a lamp, our insights falter in front of your subtle enquiry. Before the rising of the moon, the stars shine; but once the moon appears, they pale in comparison. Likewise, we cannot summon any inspired answer in the face of your profound question. Just as medicinal herbs may seem wondrous until one beholds the divine nectar, our reasoning stands mute before your divine understanding. When the sun rises, the moon appears dull and covered with mist. Likewise, our responses seem insipid when measured against your spiritual vision."

Having thus heard the brāhmaṇas humbly extol his question, Eknāth bowed before them and replied, "I am but a child; please take no offence at my words." One of the Purāṇikas at once rose, respectfully touched his own mouth in reverence, and said, "Your qualities deserve to be extolled with the sharp taste of a ripe nimba (neem) softened by the sweetness of lemon! By divine grace, our eyes have seen this marvel, and the life we have lived has found its fulfilment."

Eknāth then asked earnestly, "Though doubts may arise within the heart, to whom should one take such subtle questions? Please guide me." The scholar responded, "O seeker! In this worldly existence, one must seek the company of a sadguru—a true master and kinsman to the soul. Only then can the bondage of birth and death be broken and the cycle transcended."

Hearing these words, Eknāth's heart was deeply moved. "Now," he said to himself, "I must go with undivided devotion and surrender at the feet of such a sadguru." The guru, he thought, pervades the entire universe; there is no place without his presence. Yet, to serve

him, one must behold him in a visible, saguna form—seeing him with one's eyes and offering ceaseless service, day and night.

With this yearning firmly fixed in his heart, Eknāth wondered when the Guru would cast his glance of grace upon him. Days and nights passed in this deep concern, and he grew weary of all worldly matters. Then, one night, Eknāth went to a temple of Śiva. At the quiet hour of the night, immersed in devotional singing and pure love, his mind was fixed on the desire: "May I behold my sadguru with these very eyes."

At that very moment, a divine voice arose from the sanctum. The devavāṇī declared, "Go to the fort of Devagiri. There dwells a noble soul by the name of Janārdanpant. He is favoured by Lord Dattātreya. Go to him, and receive his darśan."

Hearing these bodiless words, Eknāth was filled with profound joy. Without informing anyone, he set out alone. Just as a man dying of thirst in the scorching heat searches madly for water, so too was Eknāth gripped with longing for the Guru's darśan, forgetting even the body's needs. Like a hungry infant searching for its mother's breast, Eknāth cried within himself, "Let me behold Janārdanpant, my Master!"

From his hometown of Paithan, Devagiri was five yojanas away. With unwavering determination, he journeyed on foot and reached the residence of the Guru. But there, guards stood at the door and blocked his entry. "You may not enter," they said sternly, and reported inside, "A young man named Ekobā claims to be your disciple and desires your audience."

Hearing the name, Janārdanpant immediately understood: "This is an auspicious sign indeed! My right eye has been twitching all day, and my arms have been throbbing—a sure sign that a noble soul is coming to see me." He rose swiftly and approached the door. As soon as his eyes fell upon the radiant Vaiṣṇava youth, he was overcome with emotion, embraced him with love, and his eyes welled with tears.

Eknāth, upon seeing the Master, at once prostrated in full surrender. "Let me serve you always," he pleaded. "Only give me the boon of fearlessness." With folded hands, he declared, "You are the embodiment of pure consciousness, the living Guru. I am fully surrendered at your feet—hold me and guide me. My mind is full of longings, desires, and imaginations; these have grown unchecked within my being. The six inner enemies—lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride, and envy—have greatly tormented me. Kindly uplift this soul!"

Recognizing the marks of true repentance and the signs of genuine yearning, the Guru's heart was moved with joy. He embraced Eknāth with love and said, "Now that I am graced with your company, even my own human birth has become blessed." Eknāth too felt as if Lord Hari Himself had come to him in this form and experienced divine bliss.

Just as the child Dhruva, wandering alone in the forest, rejoiced upon meeting the sage Nārada, so too was Eknāth filled with satisfaction upon meeting Janārdan Swāmī. All attachment to the body and home fell away, and a deep joy filled his being.

Taking him by the hand, the sadguru led Eknāth to his own private quarters. There, without delay, he offered him food with great care and reverence. Within his own heart, Janārdan reflected, "This is no ordinary man—he is a direct incarnation of the Divine! Surely, this is the fruit of some wondrous merit I have earned."

From that moment on, Eknāth began to serve his Guru with complete devotion and humility. He undertook all kinds of duties—high or low—with equal spirit, without the slightest sense of pride or resistance. His vision became rooted in the Self that pervades all beings. The manner of his service to the sadguru was a model for all to behold. Let us now hear how he conducted himself in that sacred life of service… As the final quarter of the night approached its end, the devotees would awaken for their early morning remembrance of the Lord. Completing their ablutions and ritual cleansing—shaucha and āchamana—they would begin the day with reverent pūjā to the guardian deities of the household. Without delay, they would take up brooms and with their own hands sweep the temple, joyfully removing all the remnants and refuse from the sanctum. The garbage would be collected and respectfully discarded at a distance, their hearts brimming with delight as they engaged in this service. While the servants and maids still lay asleep, they would silently purify the courtyard and surroundings. Vessels and utensils were gathered, cleaned, and arranged with their own hands, ensuring all items were spotless and ready for sacred use.

By then, Lord Janārdana would be awake. They would place water nearby for His cleansing, arranging a wooden seat where He would wash His divine feet. Clay for purification, toothbrush sticks, and warm water would be offered, along with cool water for sipping in the āchamana rite—ensuring that not even the smallest need was left unattended. All the items required for the Lord's worship—fresh flowers, sacred tulasī leaves—were brought and arranged in preparation. Then, he would bathe without delay, washing and readying his clothes with our own hands for the day's service. Following this, he would assist Janārdana Pant with his bath. Eknāth, would bring water for him, standing near with his washed clothes in hand, awaiting his word, ready to serve. To dry his body, he would squeeze out the cloth with his own hands and offer it with devotion. The wooden sandals would be promptly placed before him, laid out with great care and heartfelt love. Though the Sadguru had many devoted disciples, he would often speak as though Eknāth alone were his sole companion. Yet Eknāth saw that every task was carried out collectively, all performed joyfully and with deep love for Lord Hari.

When the Master sat down for worship of Lord Viṣṇu, Eknāth would lovingly grind the sandal paste and offer it to him. Incense, lamps, and the full arati tray were brought and kept ready at his side, all arranged for the divine service. While the Sadguru remained immersed in deep meditation, the true disciple knew what to do. With his own hands, he would sweep the

place where the Master had rested and neatly make the bed afresh. After carefully spreading the bedding, he would prepare the betel leaves and place the tobacco pouch near. Ripe fruits would be washed with devotion and respectfully arranged before the Master's seat. As the Sadguru sat for his meal, Eknāth would gently wave his hands to keep the flies away. Only after he had finished and his plate was set aside, would take his meal from the leftover vessels, partaking with devotion and deep gratitude.

He would say, "If I eat too much, the body will become dull and I will falter in the service of the Master." Therefore, I always kept my meals light, so that nothing would hinder my loving service.

Afterward, Eknāth would respectfully offer betel to the Master with my own hands and stand near him with folded palms. Once he lay down to rest, Eknāth would gently massage his feet, pouring all my love into this sacred act. At every step and every moment, such was the humility of Eknāth's service. No separation was felt, no fatigue recognized, even as months and seasons passed. Eknāth never once felt weary in his service.

Within his heart, there was a deep and unshakable joy. Eknāth, was convinced that, it was truly worthy of serving his Sadguru. He desired no one else to share in this fortune—this was the only purpose of his life. Even while keeping the household accounts and writing in the ledger, he remained undistracted from the Sadguru's presence. Though he was young in age, he possessed clarity of mind and sharp intellect. He prayed earnestly to serve the Sadguru, uniting worldly life with the path of spiritual truth. Through serving the worshipable one, he himself became worshipful. All distinction between servant and served disappeared, dissolved entirely.

One day, Janārdana turned to Eknāth and asked, "You have left your mother and father behind to be here with us. But tell me—what will become of them now?"

At that very moment, says Eknāth, both the parents had passed away. His maternal grandparents, who resided in Paithan, remained behind. Leaving them all behind, he came forth, drawn by the divine call. He said, "Apart from serving my Master, I have no other dharma or duty. I do not hold onto memories of the past; with full love and surrender, I have woven my life around His service."

For him, service to the Sadguru itself was his japa, his austerity, his vow. Even the slightest wavering from that path, he perceived as sin. Eknāth, the tender-hearted devotee, was ever immersed in the grace of his Sadguru. So deep was his love, that he would lovingly partake of even the phlegm his Master spat out when unwell, considering it sacred. He reverently served even the remnants of the betel leaves chewed by his Master, valuing them more than even the bliss of Brahman. But such signs of supreme devotion—who could recognize them in that very moment? He constantly recited Amṛtānubhava and the Jnāneśvarī, finding great joy in the pārāyaṇa (recitation) of these texts, composed by the saints. Nāth himself would lovingly listen, with focused mind, to these sacred words. Such was his daily vow. After

fulfilling all the duties of the court and official work, Janārdana would go to have darśana of the king, and then return home, never straying from this devotional routine.

One day, around the fourth watch of the day, an emergency arose—a sudden attack descended upon Devagiri. A powerful foreign force had breached the borders. An enemy of the kingdom had entered with a mighty army. The messengers brought word swiftly, and the royal court was gripped with fear. At that very moment, royal officers came rushing to the home of Janārdana Pant. "A grave threat has arisen," they said. "The enemy has arrived at the gates. You must come at once."

Janārdana had just completed his bath and sandhyā rituals, and was absorbed in meditation. When the dire news was conveyed to him, he remained unmoved by it. At that moment, Eknāth took on the entire burden with ease. Assuming the exact form of Janārdana, he appeared outwardly indistinguishable. Wearing his Master's garments, adorning his form to resemble Janārdana in every detail, with a sword in hand, he quickly seated himself in the royal palanquin. So perfect was the illusion, his gait, speech, and presence were all identical. He went straight to the king's court and apprised them of the situation.

The master was troubled with anxiety. "A powerful enemy has invaded," he said. "What now must we do?" Hearing this, the disguised Eknāth replied boldly, "By the merit of your righteousness, I shall defeat the enemy in no time."

At once, he ordered the soldiers to prepare. "Let all be ready without delay!"

As soon as the command was given, war drums began to sound, and the battle horns rang out across the land. Troops assembled and marched beyond the city gates. Though the divine Eknāth had only a small force, by his miracle it appeared immense to the enemy. Arrows whizzed through the air, weapons clashed with fierce sound, and the battlefield stirred with the rising valor of heroes. The warriors, filled with heroic ecstasy, charged into combat. Within four hours, the battlefield was engulfed in dust, and the sky turned thick and dark. Yet the valiant Vaiṣṇava warriors, through divine strength, caused the entire enemy army to retreat in fear. The enemy's heart was gripped by terror. "This does not bode well," they murmured. And thus, they sent an emissary to seek peace, saying, "We seek to come before you in person."

And when they uttered these words, the Sadguru's grace flowed abundantly upon his devotee. There was no punishment or vengeance—only peace, harmony, and noble conduct. The enemy was brought into the city and presented before the master or King. With dignity, they were offered garments and ornaments and told, "Return now peacefully to your homeland."

Thus, the battle ended in victory. Eknāth quietly returned to the hermitage, changed his form once more, and resumed his service with utmost humility.

Meanwhile, Janārdana, who had remained deep in meditation in the temple, had completed his mānasika pūjā. He then returned to his external senses and performed the ritual offerings for the household deities, and soon after, his meal was served. After sleeping for about four hours, a palanquin was called, and Janārdana Pant proceeded quickly to the royal court. When the king saw him, he greeted him with joy and honor, making him sit near and speaking these words: "Today, a mighty enemy had arrived. You went forth to face them and returned victorious. You have earned great fame."

The courtiers too echoed these praises. The king brought forth fresh garments and offered them as a mark of honor. With his own hands, he presented the robes to Janārdana Pant, saying, "With only a few soldiers, you achieved this glorious success!"

All the citizens acclaimed him as blessed and glorious. Even the royal poets began to recite praises. Janārdana, however, was filled with wonder in his heart, "I was meditating within the sanctum—how could all this have happened?" As he reflected more deeply, he understood within, "It was Eknāth. He took on my very form and completed the divine task. But this mystery must not be spoken of aloud—it will only bring confusion."

With this quiet understanding, Janārdana returned home. Taking Eknāth aside in private, he embraced him with love. He dismounted from behind and took Eknāth's hand. "Blessed indeed are you, O devotee of the Sadguru! You have revealed such a marvellous act—my heart is now fully aware."

Hearing this nectar-like speech, Eknāth fell lovingly at his Master's feet. "It is the Lord who pulls the strings," he said. "Nothing happens through my own will."

As the days passed, one day Janārdana gave an instruction: "Bring me the account book—you had written down the records. Show them to me now."

The devoted disciple, Eknāth, readily obeyed. Going to the inner chamber, Eknāth opened the ledger. There, he found one half-coin was missing. This worried him deeply. He lit a lamp and began to review the accounts with full concentration. The entire night passed—two and a half watches—yet he remained awake, determined to find the error. While checking the accounts, he discovered a missing coin and was inwardly delighted at finding it. Smiling, he tapped on the attic floor above, signaling the discovery. Janārdanapant, approaching from behind, inquired with curiosity, "What brings such joy that you laugh aloud? What is this delight in your heart?"

Hearing the Guru's words, Ekanātha placed his head at the Guru's feet and humbly replied, "While reviewing the ledger, I discovered a missing coin. Finding it brought joy to my heart."

Hearing this, Janārdanapant gave him divine counsel: "In the same manner, keep your mind fixed on Kṛṣṇa. Only then will a householder attain true welfare."

Receiving this command, Ekanātha set down his pen, rejoicing, “This is the very blessing I had longed for. Now that the Guru has commanded, I shall not utter even one unnecessary word.”

At that moment, he composed an abhaṅga from his own mouth, filled with experience and devotion. Let the faithful hear this expression of inner realization:

Abhaṅga:

“Janārdan, Lord of the three worlds, has now entered the path of trade.

A trade so great, marked by Rāma’s name, which never ceases in its flow.

He handed me a contract of ‘Soham’—I placed it reverently on my head.

A cloak of love was bestowed upon me, and the leaves of liberation fell into my lap.

He quickly built for me a city of Kevala (pure non-duality), wherein I, as pure Consciousness, now reside.

Having realized the Self, I shall send my earnings of experience to the Master.

The remaining dues I shall collect by associating with saints—

the currency of bhakti will settle the balance.

Such a trade came to me by merits of past lives—

Janārdan gave me the final stamp of fulfillment.”

—

After reciting this, Ekanātha removed even the remnants of soot from the surroundings with care, and yet his service to the Guru remained full of love. At the place where the Guru would sit for nature’s calls, Ekanātha would cleanse and sanctify the area, sweeping it thoroughly and drawing auspicious designs in white powder.

When this continued for several days, Janārdanapant asked, “Who cleans this area behind the granary so meticulously? Tell me at once.”

Despite it being a private place, each day it was found decorated with rangolī. Janārdan suspected, "Who is this lazy fellow who will not confess? I doubt someone secretly does this."

Ekanātha responded boldly, "Am I a lazy one, Master? This body has been offered for your service. All my being belongs to the Lord's seva."

Hearing these words, Janārdanapant was struck with awe and said, "From today, I can no longer consider you merely a servant. You are no ordinary human—indeed, you are a great soul."

He thought to himself, this boy must surely meet Lord Śrī Dattātreya. Let me take him to receive darśan of the Lord. Let us see the depth of his wisdom. Janārdanapant, being a royal accountant, issued a decree to all scribes: "None shall visit Bhṛgupatī's cave without our express permission."

Thus, by royal order, he abstained from appearing at the assembly hall on the appointed day. He had already planned something of greater merit. Upon the summit of a mountain lay a vast lake, its waters pristine and untouched by human feet. The tranquil atmosphere, surrounded by flowering trees and flourishing groves, soothed the soul. It was said that at that very spot, Śrī Dattātreya would manifest. Those blessed with merit and engaged in rigorous spiritual practices would receive His darśan there. Janārdanapant regularly climbed to Bhṛgupatī's peak, bathed in the lake, and performed his daily rites. He would install thousands of pārthiva liṅgas and worship them as prescribed. At the conclusion of his worship, Dattātreya would appear before him. These meetings between master and deity brought joy to both. They would speak of inner realization, and showers of bliss would descend in their hearts.

One day, Janārdanapant reflected, "Ekanātha is deeply devoted to me and serves with great love. He should receive darśan of Śrī Dattātreya. Let me bring his mind to that meditation, so that the Lord may bestow his grace."

Resolved thus, he invited Ekanātha: "Come with me now to the sacred mountain." Upon receiving the command, Ekanātha, overjoyed, bowed at his Guru's lotus feet. Taking his mat and belongings, he followed at once. Just as a child joyfully follows his father to share a meal, Ekanātha's heart was filled with delight.

Holding his hand, Janārdanapant led him up the mountain. In solitude, he instructed him, "Śrī Dattātreya will appear at this very place. He may come in disguise, with a different form. Whatever form He assumes, do not waver—keep your mind steady and free of doubt."

Having spoken thus, the divine being made it clear—apart from him, no other human should henceforth step upon this sacred mountain. This was the final utterance, sealing the moment. Thereafter, Janārdana descended to the waters of the holy lake and performed his ritual bath

in accordance with the Vaiṣṇava tradition. With steadfast devotion, he observed his daily spiritual disciplines—sandhyā-vandana, tarpaṇa, and then completed his worship of the Śiva-liṅga with utmost reverence.

Eknātha, meanwhile, gathered sacred clay and brought it to Janārdana. With a thousand liṅgas made of that clay, Janārdana performed his elaborate worship, complete with all rituals. Having thus completed the pūjā and offered final oblations, he seated himself in meditation upon the Lord of the universe. At that very moment, the son of Anasūyā, the great sage Dattātreya, appeared near the scene. Yet his appearance was that of a wandering mendicant—his body covered in skins, his eyes large and crimson like fire. With his own hand he turned a beads, absorbed in the contemplation of the Supreme Brahman. By his side stood a cow, Kāmadhenū, yet appearing to the ordinary eye as a mere stray dog. But Janārdana recognized the divine presence within, and bowed with heartfelt humility. Janārdana and Dattātreya meet in that moment of deep, mutual love.

Their union was like the merging of light and rays, or the inseparability of fragrance from a flower, or of taste from nectar. Such was the pure love that existed between them. Just as the sound is not apart from the instrument, or the field not apart from the knower of the field, so too were Janārdana and the Avadhūta united in spirit at that sacred hour. Seated together, they began speaking of the bliss of the Self, words soaked in the essence of divine joy. Eknātha listened, his ears drawn to every syllable, his heart swelling with satisfaction and spiritual contentment. Then Dattātreya instructed Janārdana to bring him the earthen bowl, and said, "See there—the dog, now seated—draw milk from her." Receiving the command, Janārdana immediately took a vessel and, without delay, drew milk from the divine cow, though veiled as a dog, and filled the bowl. Seated calmly, the Avadhūta accepted the bowl. From his worn-out pouch he took dried bread and crumbled it with his own hands into the milk. Though it seemed to be old, stale food gathered through begging, to the wise it was a celestial meal.

The Lord wished to test the devotee’s bhāva (inner feeling). Though to the eye it appeared unpalatable, to the realized it was nectar. Eknātha, however, experienced a moment of doubt in his mind. Perceiving this, the Avadhūta turned to Janārdana and said, “Let this servant of yours join us for the meal.” The command filled Janārdana with joy. Janārdana and the divine Dattātreya partook of the meal from the same vessel, relishing the taste of self-bliss. Once done, they washed their hands and mouths with water from the earthen bowl. Then they chewed betel leaves and seated themselves again, peaceful and contented.

Dattātreya then instructed Eknātha to go to the lake and clean the vessel, saying gently, “Do this, my child—it is necessary.” At the lake's edge, Eknātha sat, reflecting deeply. The food he had received was no ordinary meal—it was mahāprasāda, and ought to be consumed with inner love. Realizing that the remnants of the Sadguru are no different from the sacred Gaṅgā or Bhāgīrathī, he recalled that all sādhanās are fulfilled thereby, and that liberation itself is granted through such grace. Thinking thus, without hesitation, he placed the

remaining prasāda upon his tongue, saying within himself, “In all the three worlds, can there be a greater fortune than mine?”

Having seen this act, Janārdana bowed to Dattātreya and pleaded, “O Lord, please call this servant near and reveal to him your divine form.”

Dattātreya then answered, “Because I had assumed a veiled form, he did not recognize me. Now I shall reveal my true form, that he may know.”

So saying, the sage transformed before their eyes. The dog that had lain nearby now appeared as Kāmadhenū, radiant and divine. Casting off the garb of the mendicant, he now assumed a wondrous, transcendental form—dark as a monsoon cloud, with six arms, large lotus-like eyes, and a face more radiant than the universe itself. Thus revealing his true nature, he called Eknātha near. With love, Eknātha fell at his feet, placing his head upon the Lord’s lotus feet. Then the Lord extended all six arms and embraced him lovingly. Stroking Eknātha’s face with his hand, Dattātreya disappeared from view. By the grace of Janārdana, Eknātha had thus received the divine darśana of Śrī Dattātreya himself. Janārdana then held Eknātha by the hand and brought him back to his home.

O loving devotees, listen now to the next sweet portion of this nectarine tale, with your hearts full of devotion. Just as a miser counts every coin, not letting even the tiniest fall, so too must this sacred narrative be received. For he who recalls the compassionate Lord Rukmiṇīpati will truly understand the meaning of this text. Otherwise, even kings with all their pride and power remain fools, clinging to but one worldly name.

This Bhakta Līlāmṛta, when heard with devotion, fulfills all cherished desires. This Thirteenth Chapter is especially filled with divine rasa for loving devotees—a stream of sacred sweetness.

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Chapter 14

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Śrī Gaṇeśa)

All seekers yearn for union with the Supreme. To attain this divine goal, they search for the most effective means. Of all paths, the highest and most accessible is the company of saints—sat-saṅga—which must therefore be embraced with sincerity. All holy places—great and small, famed in the Purāṇas and sanctified by time—are ever found in the presence of saints. In their company, it is as if all sacred festivals, pilgrimages, and holy rivers reside permanently. In this age of Kali, the traditional paths of yoga, sacrifice, austerities, and ritual observances are no longer easy or fruitful. The restless mind refuses to remain still; it cannot focus on meditating upon Mahāviṣṇu. Therefore, to help the struggling soul cross the ocean of worldly existence, the Lord Himself has established the boat of His Holy Name. No higher means exists, and the wise Vaiṣṇavas know this truth well. Even Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa proclaimed in the Bhāgavata that the Supreme state is attained by chanting His Name. This is the firm declaration of the Vedas and the Viṣṇu Sūkta.

If one truly desires to fix unwavering faith in the Name, then the seeker must first associate with saints. Through their company, the mind naturally becomes illuminated. In the company of such sādhus, attentive listening (śravaṇa) takes place effortlessly. That listening leads to reflection (manana), which in turn blossoms into deep contemplation (nididhyāsana).

In the previous chapter, the tale of Eknātha was narrated, wherein Guru Janārdana, beholding Eknātha with the glance of grace, made Lord Śrī Dattātreya appeared before him. That divine play was shown for the benefit of the world. Having taken the form of a Sadguru, the Lord, filled with divine desire, took Eknātha's hand and led him to His celestial abode. What happened next shall now be revealed.

By the grace of the Lord, the darkness of ignorance within Eknātha was dispelled completely. He was blessed by Dattātreya with full realization, yet he did not abandon the path of service—not even to the slightest degree. Like the touch of a wish-fulfilling gem that perfects all, the Lord nurtured him with love and devotion. Freed from all delusions and attachments, Eknātha devoted himself wholly to the worship of the Supreme Person. Just as air pervades the entire cosmos yet does not abandon its restless nature, and just as the Gaṅgā merges into the ocean but does not cease its flowing, so too, though Eknātha immersed in divine knowledge, he maintained the sacred boundaries of devotion. The true devotee of Supreme Lord never abandons their devotional duties. Eknātha, likewise, remained perfectly situated in that truth. Even after attaining self-knowledge and receiving the blessings of his Sadguru, he continued to serve unwaveringly, never allowing even a trace of laziness to enter his being. Seeing such steadfast devotion, Janārdana thought within himself, "Is there any devotee in all three worlds whose love is as wondrous and genuine as his?"

To uplift the world, Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga sent his dear servant. And yet, even while placing Eknātha in His service, the Lord ensured that Eknātha did not transgress even the tiniest spiritual discipline. Such was the Lord's thought, and while He contemplated thus, He beheld Eknātha seated alone in his home, joyfully singing the glories of Śrī Dattātreya.

When Janārdana approached, Eknātha rose with deep reverence and bowed before Him. The Sadguru then seated himself and began to instruct Eknātha.

Through the clear grace of the Sadguru, Eknātha attained self-realization. Yet even with that realization, he was reminded to never abandon devotion to the Lord's manifest form, deity. Though yogīs suppress all the senses and abandon worldly pleasures, without devotion, they cannot behold the Lord's beautiful form. No matter how advanced they are in meditation, without bhakti, Śrīpati remains far from them. Though they may demonstrate yogic feats and attain various powers, without loving devotion, they never attain the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Even if one sees the entire universe as one with the self and forgets all bodily identity, the direct vision of the Lord's divine form remains elusive—this truth Eknātha deeply realized. As long as one lives in the body, one should cultivate love for the Lord's manifest form. Now, let Me tell you the secret path—concentrate your heart and listen carefully.

In the sacred region of Devagirī, there lies a mountain known as Sula-bha, easy to approach. Upon that peak, there is a holy pond called Sūryakuṇḍa, surrounded by solitude and serenity. Seekers journey there to perform their austerities, and upon doing so, they are often blessed with divine vision. That land is truly pure and sanctified.

Janārdana said, "So, dear soul, listen. One should hurry to that sacred place. Having bathed in Sūryakuṇḍa, one should remember Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga with deep devotion. With concentrated mind, meditate on Mahāviṣṇu. Do not speak with anyone. Follow these instructions precisely. Whatever comes to you unexpectedly, accept it with joy. Do not complain. Know that I am present there, near you. That place is renowned as the very seat of Sage Mārkaṇḍeya. The Purāṇas declare its sanctity. There, one should meditate on Lord Kṛṣṇa with loving heart. If any extraordinary vision occurs, return at once to Me."

Thus, with joy swelling in his heart, Eknātha heard these words of the Sadguru. Being a sincere disciple filled with love, and having already received the instruction of his Guru, he was content in his soul. He bowed to his master and departed. Some teachers speak only of dry knowledge, destroying the sweetness of devotion. But Janārdana was not such a teacher. He upheld the path of devotion firmly. Knowledge without devotion is like hollow speech, without meaning. Listen, O noble ones, to the words of the Master on this matter.

Abhaṅga:

Knowledge is born from the womb of devotion. Devotion gives glory even to knowledge. It is devotion that is the root of knowledge and detachment. Without devotion, knowledge remains shallow. How can it yield the ultimate fruit?

When Janārdana performed any act with devotion, it was always grounded in knowledge of Brahman. Thus, hear well, O seeker: if one teaches knowledge while discarding devotion, and thereby breaks the bond between devotee and Lord, such a one is the lowest of beings—none can be worse.

Blessed indeed is the Sadguru Janārdana! Or perhaps it is Janārdana Himself who appeared in manifest form. He came for the upliftment of the world—this I feel in my heart.

While narrating this divine state of Guru-bhakti, a small digression occurred. O listener, do not tire. I had to give this example to illustrate the point.

Once the Guru's command was given, Eknātha immediately bowed and, with resolve, departed for the Sula-bha mountain. Seeing that beautiful place, his heart found deep peace. He bathed in the sacred waters of Sūryakuṇḍa and began his daily austerities. Facing the east, he sat in deep concentration. Fixing his mind, he brought before him the form of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga. His meditation became filled with love. At once, the Lord appeared vividly in his heart—Viṣṇu, seated with Lakṣmī on His chest. Eknātha's mind became one with Him, and he lost all bodily awareness.

At that very mountain, a great serpent had its dwelling. Seeing Eknātha in deep meditation, the serpent rushed towards him to strike. It coiled itself around his body, intending to bite. But the moment it touched his saintly form, its evil intellect left its body. Now overcome with reverence, it sought only to protect. To shield him from heat and cold, it wrapped itself fully around his body, resting its tail at his navel and raising its hood above his head. Abandoning its previous nature of darkness (tāmasik guṇa), the serpent adopted a peaceful, sattvic quality. Its entire consciousness was transformed by the mere touch of the saint. As Eknātha approached, the serpent gently left his body. It vanished from sight, never to return. Immersed in the divine form and name, Eknātha had transcended bodily identity. He did not even realize the serpent had been upon him.

At the foot of that mountain, there was a small hamlet. In it lived a simple farmer—a Vaiṣṇava by heart, devout and sincere. Though born in a worldly household, he was in truth a yoga-bhraṣṭa—one who had fallen from previous spiritual efforts. Thus, he practiced pure conduct. A tulasī grove stood at his door. He swept and cleaned the house daily. He would never eat without first bathing. Though engaged in worldly duties, he constantly remembered the Lord's Name. His wife was likewise a woman of great chastity and virtue. Understanding her husband's mind, she also served saints with devotion. They fed the hungry, gave water to the thirsty, and spoke only truth. Their hearts overflowed with compassion. When ascetics came to perform penance on that mountain, the farmer would offer them warm milk with loving hands. His field was near the mountain's base, and he kept watch over the growing crop.

One day, as Eknātha was immersed in his practice, the farmer beheld him in meditation. He returned home, boiled fresh milk, and brought it joyfully. At that moment, Eknātha had just concluded his meditation and sat peacefully. The farmer bowed before him and humbly offered the milk. Moved by his sincerity, Eknātha accepted the offering. Taking the vessel in his own hands, he invoked the name of Lord Kṛṣṇa and drank. The farmer, deeply satisfied, returned home. From that day, his wife would bring milk daily to Eknātha before partaking in any food themselves. Indeed, only through merit from past births can one serve saints. Gratitude for such merit is owed to God Himself, who delivers one across the ocean of saṃsāra. Those who serve saints with love bring joy to the very life of the universe. No greater path exists than this. That farmer was truly blessed by fortune. Because of this, he had pure understanding. Through household life, he attained the Supreme—and the fruits of his merits were boundless.

One night, that devout farmer's wife arose at midnight to begin grinding grain. As she labored, she sang sacred ovīs in praise of the Lord, and having completed the task with reverence, she began to prepare for the morning. As the moonlight illumined the sky, she mistook its brightness for dawn. Thinking daybreak was near, she milked the cow with her own hands and carefully placed the fresh milk in a separate vessel. Time passed swiftly, and before long, she had a great quantity of milk. Pouring it into a shining brass vessel, she placed a cover over it with devotion. Then, she swept and cleansed the courtyard, bathed using water scented with sacred herbs, and completed the morning rituals. Just then, the first rays of sunlight began to appear on the horizon.

She thought to herself, "Since I rose early and ground the grain, and the night was long, I was able to prepare the food in time. Though we may reach the fields a little late today, our duties will be fulfilled."

Thus saying, the virtuous woman placed the griddle for making flatbreads on the stove and, taking the vessel of milk in her own hands, hastened quickly toward the mountain path. As she reached the watch-station near the field, her husband saw her with his own eyes. Taking the milk vessel from her hand, he silently proceeded to bathe.

Following his daily routine of remembrance and recitation of the Lord's name, he then turned to his wife and gently asked, "Why have you brought food so early today? I feel no hunger, nor is this a festival day or an auspicious occasion like Dvādaśī. And since the sage is observing penance upon the mountain, it is improper for us to eat before him."

To this, his wife replied, "When I awoke, it was still the middle of the night. But because I began the chores early, I was able to complete the preparations before daybreak. Hence, I brought the milk at once."

She continued, "Please go at once to the mountain and offer the milk to the Brahmin sage. Only after that should we partake of any food ourselves."

Taking the vessel into his hands, the farmer went toward the mountain. There, he beheld a wondrous and terrifying sight, the memory of which he would never forget. Eknātha sat in deep meditation, having completed his bath and daily rituals. His mind was absorbed entirely in Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa; all bodily awareness had vanished. A great serpent had slithered up and wrapped its entire body around Eknātha. Its tail rested upon his navel, and its hood was raised above his head like a canopy. Seeing this with his own eyes, the farmer was struck with overwhelming fear. His heart trembled. He thought, "This Brahmin sage, immersed in austerity, is now entwined by a serpent!"

In desperation, he cried aloud, "O Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga of Paṇḍharpur! Come quickly and save him now! My efforts are in vain—I have no strength, no intelligence. All is lost!"

Tears welled in his eyes as he lamented, "This ascetic does not stir—surely the dark serpent has already bitten him! All my service, all my merit has been made fruitless."

He cried out again and again, calling for help. Yet the serpent did not move away. "Alas, the Brahmin is dead! He is gone!" he wailed.

The place was lonely and remote; no other humans were around to hear him. Who would answer his cries? Yet still, he screamed for the protection of life. At last, as a final act of devotion, he cupped his hands to his mouth and loudly blew the sound of a śaṅkha—a conch—crying, "O Lord of the helpless! O Bearer of the Sudarśana discus! Come swiftly, O Viṣṇu, and protect him!"

At the sound of this commotion, Eknātha stirred. Hearing the tumult, some subtle movement returned to his body. At once, the serpent fled from his body and vanished. Gaining full awareness, Eknātha opened his eyes and gently sprinkled water upon them with his own hands. Then, seeing the farmer nearby, he asked calmly, "Tell me, dear soul, what has happened?"

Still shaken, the farmer replied, "I saw the serpent wound tightly around your body. I was terrified. I thought you had passed away and thus blew the conch loudly."

With humility, he continued, "It was your firmness, your vow to the Lord's lotus feet, that protected you in that moment. I felt within me that death had surely come—but time had not!"

Hearing the farmer's sincere words, Eknātha responded with a spontaneous abhaṅga, composed out of love:

Abhaṅga:

"When Death came to strike,

He himself was transformed by compassion.

Now we are well acquainted with him—

My mind no longer trembles.

All bodily fear has melted away,

And Death has become but a passing breeze.

At the feet of Janārdana,

Life and death are one and the same."

Having spoken thus with great affection, Eknātha lovingly opened his eyes wide and fixed them upon the Lord's form. In his heart, he meditated deeply upon the divine form of Pāṇḍuraṅga.

He prayed, "O Dweller of the Ocean of Milk! O One who reclines upon Śeṣa! O Beloved of Lakṣmī, Enchanter of the mind! O Lord of all life, O Śrī Hari, who is pure Consciousness made manifest! All glories to You, O Lord of Vaikuṇṭha! Your glories are infinite and boundless. Even the Vedas, having attempted to describe Your greatness, fell silent in exhaustion. The intellect of all beings is humbled before You."

"O Lord, though unconquerable and imperishable, transcendent of Māyā and untouched by affliction, even the wisest struggle to comprehend You, and the grasp of Your essence eludes them despite their efforts. You are verily the Lord of all celestial beings. By chanting Your Name, even Śiva feels nourished and fulfilled. Though You have pervaded the entire cosmos, You remain unbound by it, without a place to be confined or contained. Yet, for the sake of Your true devotees, You assumed a four-armed form, complete with conch and discus, and descended into this world. My eyes were ever hungry for a glimpse of that divine form, yearning to behold it. Moved by such earnest praise, the consort of Rukmiṇī—the Lord Himself—manifested before me. His form was dusky and four-armed, adorned with the conch and discus in His hands."

"His divine face was resplendent and captivating. Makara-shaped earrings adorned His ears. The Kaustubha gem shimmered upon His chest, while the golden yellow garment radiated with divine brilliance. A radiant Vaijayantī garland graced His frame, and the sacred three lines of śrīvatsa adorned His chest with majesty. Small golden bells tinkled gently, calming the hearts of those who beheld them. His body was anointed with fragrant sandalwood paste. A bold saffron tilaka graced His forehead. Upon His chest, the śrīvatsa mark gleamed. The soft, sacred tulasī garland added to His splendor. At that moment, the divine effulgence emanating from His form dimmed even the brilliance of the sun. When I opened my eyes and beheld Śrīnātha before me, I saw the Supreme Brahman in a beautiful, dark-hued form."

"With loving devotion swelling in my heart, I embraced the Lord's lotus feet with deep reverence. The Lord of the universe lovingly embraced me in return, drawing me into His

chest with tender affection. Seating the Lord upon a sacred āsana, I offered Him worship with the purest offerings of my mind—manasopacāra-pūjā. He, the ocean of grace, smiled and said, “By the shadow of My grace, I have fulfilled the deepest longing of your heart.”

The meeting of God and devotee had thus taken place. By the power of divine compassion, I had been granted the vision of the Lord. A wave of supreme bliss surged within me, and I declared, “Surely this is the rarest blessing to be found in this world, granted by divine destiny.” Saying so, I bowed repeatedly to the Lord. Then Śrī Hari, having exchanged loving glances and words, slowly withdrew His form and disappeared. The Lord of life and creation had taken residence in the hearts of His devotees, delighting therein. Witnessing this miraculous vision, the humble cultivator fell prostrate and offered sincere obeisance. He exclaimed, “By the blessed company of the Master, I too beheld with my own eyes the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha. Otherwise, how could I—lowly by birth and dull of mind—have merited such a vision?”

To uplift the world, saints incarnate upon the earth. And in this, I have received a great miracle. With folded hands, I sang His praises again and again. Then, holding a vessel of milk, I humbly offered it as refreshment to Śrīnātha, considering Him my very own Sadguru and worshipping Him with deep devotion. Perceiving the purity of my sentiment, the Lord drank the milk. Through subtle glances, He indicated for me to return to my home. I circumambulated Him with reverence and, bowing to the ground, offered a full prostration. Considering it the greatest gain of my life, I joyfully returned to my dwelling.

In my heart, a firm conviction arose—Śrīnātha is indeed the Supreme Person, Parabrahman. This divine līlā has now been made manifest and firmly etched into my soul. Meanwhile, as two prahar (six hours) passed, the sun rose high and its rays turned fierce. Seeking respite from the heat, I sat for a while beneath the cooling shade of a banyan tree.

While resting there, I recalled Janārdana Svāmī’s command: “If you behold something extraordinary with your eyes, then return and tell Me.” By the boundless grace of the Sadguru, I had indeed witnessed the Lord's manifest form. There could be no greater marvel than this. A supreme blessing had taken place.

With that realization, I offered mental obeisance, rose swiftly, and journeyed to Devagiri to meet my revered Sadguru. Upon reaching, I prostrated fully and was warmly embraced by Janārdana. Perceiving the change in my countenance, the guru gently inquired, “What happened? I see divine signs upon you.”

Then, at the guru’s request, I narrated all that had transpired, revealing even the deepest meanings. I concluded, “By the grace of my Master, I attained that which is otherwise unattainable.”

Eknātha recollects, then, one day, Janārdana Svāmī spoke thus to me: "A deep desire has arisen in My heart to bathe in the holy Gaṅgā." Choosing an auspicious day and moment, Janārdana prepared to depart on his pilgrimage. For the journey, I was entrusted with the task of guiding his horse. One horse carried the Guru, and one bore his provisions. A devout brāhmaṇa, skilled in rituals, was also appointed for the journey. With swift preparation, we set out. Reaching a beautiful and serene place, we chose to reside there for some time. In that sacred company, we engaged in discussions of the Supreme Lord, exchanging joyful spiritual dialogues. Wherever such sādhus and saints gather, there arises great affection. With hearts full of peace, we spent our nights in that place, each day a blessed one. As the journey continued, we came upon a large village. There resided a noble brāhmaṇa named Candrabhaṭṭa—a devout Vaiṣṇava of great renown. Hearing of his saintly fame brought joy to the hearts of Guru, disciple, and all the saints with us. As the sun began to set, we reached his home and were warmly welcomed.

Seeing our Vaiṣṇava bearing, Candrabhaṭṭa honoured us with reverence. Bowing to each other with affection, we soon met and conversed. Though a householder, Candrabhaṭṭa lived with complete detachment, sustaining himself with what came unasked, leading an undisturbed spiritual life. His discipline was pure—he practiced austerities of body, speech, and mind, constantly. He never let a lie pollute his words, and no impure thought touched his life.

He performed daily bath, sandhyā prayers, and deity worship, ever eager to serve others. He treated all beings as his own self and was filled with compassion for every living creature. Desiring to break free from the bondage of worldly life, he constantly sought the company of saints. In his heart, he yearned for the day his worldly entanglements would be resolved and his soul freed."

Such was the noble brāhmaṇa Candrabhaṭṭa, detached and pure of heart, to whom Eknātha and Janārdana now came with affectionate love. After completing their evening sandhyā rituals, they were offered sacred refreshments. Candrabhaṭṭa, seated in seclusion, then opened a holy text and began to recite from it. He was expounding the Catuḥśloki Bhāgavata—those four supreme verses imparted by Lord Śrīhari to Brahmā. Candrabhaṭṭa gave a profound exposition of the meanings, illuminating subtle interpretations with great clarity.

Then Eknātha and Janārdana came near and sat with him. They joyfully exclaimed, "Blessed indeed is this day, for we have been granted the sight of a true saint." As they listened, their hearts filled with joy, for he was a loving orator, well-versed in the śāstras. As he explained the meanings, he did so with great simplicity, and his words drew the heart with sweetness. As he spoke from deep personal experience, his voice grew choked with emotion. Tears flowed from his eyes as he spoke with love. The three of them sat in a state beyond bodily awareness, immersed in divine bliss.

It felt as though Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Maheśa had come together in one place. Or, as if Gaṅgā, Yamunā, and Sarasvatī had merged into a single current, so deep was their spiritual bond. Thus did they spend the night, soaked in mutual love. When the scripture had been completed, they gave in to rest. But in their hearts, a prayer resounded: "May we always remain in such divine company!" For both Eknātha and Janārdana were accomplished in karma, upāsanā, and jnāna—proficient in all paths. They spoke to one another of deep truths. So passed the night in bliss. At dawn, they prepared to depart. But Candrabhaṭṭa came forward and made a heartfelt plea. He said, "Please, fulfil this one request of mine. After completing your morning rituals, kindly purify my āśrama with your presence."

Seeing the sincerity of his devotion, Janārdana replied without hesitation, "Certainly, I shall do so."

In the sanctified home, having prepared the sacred meal with utmost purity, the daily rituals were performed with sincerity and devotion. Naivedya was offered to the deities with love, followed by the Vaishvadeva ritual. Thereafter, the sacred meal was served, and the household sat for their repast in reverence.

Seated together in the same row for the meal were the exalted saints Eknath, Janardana, and the devout householder Chandrabhat. Only after they had dined did they permit others to partake of the food. Betel leaves were respectfully offered for mouth purification, and with heartfelt humility, Chandrabhat entreated, "May your gracious company remain with me always." This sincere desire arose from the depths of his heart.

To this, Janardana replied, "Such indeed is the yearning within our own hearts. Do not hesitate—let us remain together as one." Overcome with joy, Chandrabhat recognized the rare fortune of gaining such holy companionship, wherein peace and renunciation accompanied him.

Together, they journeyed joyfully, hearts immersed in devotional singing. They traveled along the path of righteousness, discussing the inner meanings of the Chatushloki Bhagavata, and their minds were suffused with bliss.

Along the way, they encountered various saints, sages, and yogis. With each meeting, deep love was kindled, and conversations turned to profound truths of the Self. With such spiritual engagements, they soon arrived at Panchavati, where they bathed in the sacred waters of Ramakunda, their hearts steeped in repentance and devotion.

Following the prescribed rituals at the holy site, they proceeded to the temple of Shri Ramachandra, offering worship with singular love. There, they performed proper puja and sang hymns in abundance. With heartfelt prayers and peace in their hearts, they pleased both the celestial and earthly realms.

Then, Janardana turned to Eknath and said, "O blessed one, hear now these words. By your merit and divine fortune, you have received the grace of Shri Dattatreya." Chandrabhat,

upon hearing this, had brought the Chatushloki Bhagavata with him. Janardana encouraged Eknath to compose a lucid commentary in the vernacular, so that all might understand.

These words of the venerable guru brought great joy to Eknath's heart. Thus, with love, he commenced the sacred task. Beginning with the verses, he carefully expounded their meanings, and upon completing the manuscript, presented it reverently to his guru. Chandrabhat, Janardana, and the noble Brahmins of the holy land all rejoiced upon hearing the recital of the commentary. At the very beginning of the work, Eknath had rendered the Chatushloki into Marathi, at which point the guru said: "You shall also interpret the Eleventh Canto of the Bhagavata. Let your tongue be the pen that inscribes its essence in the common tongue. With the help of Shri Krishna himself, express the entire meaning." At these words, Eknath bowed in humility, and the reading of the sacred text was carried forward by Chandrabhat.

Though signs of karmic renunciation and devotion were apparent in Eknath, still he humbly employed the vernacular to express the truths of the Lord, adhering daily to the sacred discipline of spiritual practice. Seeing the purity of Chandrabhat's intentions, Janardana proclaimed, "This is the ideal union of guru and disciple. To uplift the world you both appeared." Such deep conviction filled his heart, and he continuously praised them.

Hearing this, the Brahmins of the holy place exclaimed with awe, "Blessed indeed is this sight!" Later, they traveled to Tryambakeshwar, where they bathed in the sacred Kusavarta, donning the sacred thread anew upon Brahmagiri. There, they beheld Tripurari (Shiva) and, completing the rites, remained for three nights.

Their pilgrimage now complete, they began their return journey toward Devagiri. Yet Chandrabhat's heart had grown detached. Thoughts of wife, child, home, and wealth no longer stirred his spirit, for he had already renounced them inwardly. And so he returned to Devagiri with the saints. At Janardana's abode, a sacred meal was offered to the ancestors on the following day. The tongue now delighting in divine names, Chandrabhat's mind remained ever immersed in loving remembrance. His heart declared Eknath to be a divine servant of Supreme Lord, a sage of immense wisdom and eloquence, despite his youthful frame. He resolved never to part from such holy company and remained there perpetually, firm in his vow.

Thus passed many days, until at last he attained the state beyond the body. In his vision, all appeared as Janardana himself, and he immersed into that divine form. Having discarded all sense of bodily identity, his mind never again turned toward the ephemeral. Righteous actions remained his natural state, and he perceived the world as his own self. This realization was so firmly rooted in him that he adopted the name "Chand" as an expression of that supreme knowledge. And so it was that people began to speak of him by that name.

After some time, Chand inquired of Janardana directly: "Now, I feel a yearning to enter into samadhi." Perceiving his disciple's inner resolve, Janardana permitted it, but added a

precaution: “There may be some disturbance from the Yavanas (foreign invaders).” And so, a clever solution was devised.

Just as the Mazar of Avindha was venerated, so too a structure was built above the place of samadhi, pleasing both Hindus and Yavanas alike. To this day, that site remains on Devagiri’s mountain, where many miracles are still witnessed.

One day, Janardana pondered within himself, “Eknath should be sent on a pilgrimage. Through him, the earth shall be sanctified.” Calling Eknath to a private chamber, he addressed him with gentle command. Bowing at his guru’s feet, Eknath began to sing praises, saying: “All glory to you, Guru Janardana, beyond illusion and pure. I am but a child at your feet—how can I comprehend your divine greatness? Your true glory remains unfathomable.”

Having offered these praises, Eknath bowed again and vowed, “Whatever command you give, I shall fulfill it with my whole being.” Hearing such nectar-like words, Janardana replied with joy, “Visit the sacred places across the land. Where a stay of three nights is required, observe it. Where five nights are prescribed, follow that too. Offer obeisance to those who manifest the divine, and see the saints who dwell in these places. Through the guise of pilgrimage, you will behold holy souls, and the Lord Krishna himself shall ensure your protection and well-being. Visit Badrinath and witness the northern Manasarovar with your own eyes. Go also to southern Rameshwaram, then return to me once your journey is complete.”

Hearing these divine instructions, joy arose in Eknath’s heart. Though he felt sorrow at parting from his guru’s form, he took solace in the hope of seeing saints along the way. Still, separation from the saguna form of the guru pierced his heart with longing. Back home, he prepared a grand meal. Once again, seated in a single row, they dined. After cleansing the mouth with betel leaves, Eknath felt a deep sense of contentment. As Sri Eknath set out for the pilgrimage, Janardana accompanied him a little way, just as a loving father escorts his daughter to her in-laws' home. In the forested path ahead, Eknath bowed his head at the guru’s feet and implored him: “May your grace ever remain with me—for it is now embedded in my very being.” His throat choked with emotion, tears flowed from his eyes, and love surged from within.

At that moment, Janardana spoke: “I reside always in your heart. There is no separation between us. Remember this truth—do not let sorrow arise from the illusion of parting. You are none other than my very self. Cast off this notion of duality. Let not the pain of separation burden your soul.”

Placing his own turban reverently upon Nath’s head, Janardana blessed him. When the sacred maha-prasad arrived, it was received with joy, and Eknath humbly entreated once more: “Grant me your vision again in the future.” Reading the deep secrets of his disciple’s heart, Janardana assured him with a firm promise.

Eknath circumambulated his guru and offered a loving farewell. Remembering his guru's divine form, he began his journey swiftly. As he walked, he often turned back, eyes brimming, offering repeated prostrations while his master was still in sight. Chanting "Victory to Janardana!" he hastened forward. And thus, having taken leave of Nath, the guru returned hermitage.

Yet in every moment, Eknath's mind recollected his guru's virtues. Deep longing filled Janardana's heart too—he felt no peace in his separation.

For saints are verily the embodied form of Panduranga. How can one describe their true state? Foolish as I am, to have spoken casually in their presence—this indeed is my offense. But by the force of love, though lacking in wisdom, I dared utter these words. Yet it is none other than Panduranga, beloved of Rukmini, dweller on the banks of the Bhima, who causes such utterances to arise.

That Lord, so tender with his devotees, speaks his own glories through their mouths. Even kings become mere instruments in his play—the poet is never the true author.

Thus concludes the blessed Bhakta-Lilamrita, a nectar-filled account of divine devotees. Its very hearing fulfills the heart's desires. Sweet as the touch of love, this fourteenth chapter brings joy to every true seeker.

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Chapter 15

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (In the name of Śrī Gaṇeśa, I begin)

When the glories of the Lord are boundless and eternal, even the intellects of the greatest sages fall silent, their reasonings reaching a dead end. Then what of our ordinary, worldly minds—how could they ever grasp His divine greatness? Just as mighty ships sail the vast ocean with confidence, yet a fragile raft, if cast adrift, would never reach the opposite shore, so too is the plight of our limited understanding before the unfathomable depths of the Lord's līlā. When the radiant sun rises in the east, even the moon and stars fade into oblivion. Before that effulgence, what glory could the firefly claim? No thought can even begin to comprehend such majesty. To attempt to weigh the earth upon a scale—who could devise a pan so vast? To encircle the sky with one's bare hands—such a feat is inconceivable. Thus is the Lord's greatness: beyond all measure, beyond all conception. Who could dare gaze upon the full splendour of a cowherdess' tender calf and not be overwhelmed? Likewise, when one attempts to describe the attributes of Mahāviṣṇu, even the intellect and mind go astray, unable to bear the intensity of that vision. As a child lisps incoherent sounds while beholding its mother, yet she receives it with affection, charmed by the innocence and love—even so, the saints, acknowledging the limits of mortal understanding, speak words drawn from the śāstras, with love and awe for the Lord. Thus, with childlike innocence, the devotees express what they can of the Divine, realising that their knowledge is limited, and humbly offering their attempts as a gesture of devotion—accepting themselves as children in the court of the Almighty King.

In the earlier chapter, an extraordinary story was told—how Eknātha had set forth on a pilgrimage to holy places. Left behind, Janārdana-svāmi often felt pangs of sorrow, constantly recalling the noble qualities of his beloved disciple.

Meanwhile, in the sacred land of Pratiṣṭhāna, the old grandparents—Ajā and Ajī—resided at home, unaware and unconsulted, when Eknātha suddenly departed for Devagiri. So devoted was Eknātha to the service of his Sadguru that he did not return home again, not even once. This left the elderly couple deeply anxious; they searched for him everywhere, going from house to house. They asked many passersby, "Have you seen our Eknātha?" But none could answer. The two wept together in helpless sorrow. Their days and nights were spent wandering the sacred land, inquiring of all they met. Peace eluded them completely, their minds wholly absorbed in thoughts of Śrī Eknātha. Food and water brought no sweetness; the nights felt like long, oppressive years. They constantly remembered the child's virtues, but no one could offer them reassurance or clarity. Having lost both his parents in childhood, only their care had remained as his refuge. Now, it felt as if their very support had been snatched away, and they were left utterly alone to endure the burden of time. Like a blind man robbed of his guiding stick, they were struck with despair: "Where has our Eknātha gone? When will our eyes behold him again?" Such were the anguished thoughts that

tormented their hearts. The people of the town—people of all three castes—watched and murmured among themselves, speaking many conflicting opinions. Some, with heartless tongues, spoke cruel words against the boy, suggesting he had fled in shame. Though the grandparents remained ever eager and willing to care for him, none could match the tenderness of true parents. To those who did not raise the child, his burden seemed foreign; only the one who bears the weight truly feels it.

One person said, "It's all foolishness! These old folks indulged the boy too much. A stubborn, heartless lad—he abandoned them without a second thought."

Another remarked, "From his youngest days, I observed signs of his worth. After his parents died, and poverty struck swiftly, his grandparents raised him with love."

Despite their care and sacrifices, now in their old age, there was no one left even to fetch them a cup of water. This was the bitter truth they had to endure. The people around them spoke in various ways, each voice carrying its own judgment. But the two elders knew no peace. Restless and sorrowful, they wandered the land, searching diligently. They sought out pilgrims, travelers to tīrthas, traders and even wandering cloth merchants, asking, "Have you seen our Eknātha? Did your eyes fall upon him?"

They approached the Sāloṅkhīyas of Kāgarāva, inquiring once more, "Did you see Eknātha?" Then they rushed toward the desert, bowed humbly before Gaṅgādevī, and offered earnest prayers. They pleaded, "Though our eyes see no desert, you have drowned our lives in this sorrow! Tell us truly—where is he? Every day, we beg Gaṅgādevī with this same prayer."

Meanwhile, Eknātha had gone to meet his Sadguru. The couple stood in the sea of sorrow, their eyes heavy with tears, grieving day and night. Relatives, friends, and noble souls—everyone visited their home to console them. They tried to offer peace, saying, "Though he is young in age, he shows all the signs of greatness. His mind is always fixed in the worship of the Lord; he listens daily to the Purāṇas. He has deep reverence for sādhus, saints, and Vaiṣṇavas. He chants the holy name of Śrīrāma constantly, with true sincerity upon his lips. Seeing such discernment in one so young gives us great joy. The Lord of Vaikuṇṭha Himself will surely protect him—there is no need to remain in grief. He has deep interest in hearing spiritual scriptures. Wherever there is a sat-saṅga, he seats himself with devotion and eagerness."

One said, "To hear the Purāṇas, he would sit among the learned scholars. Once, a Purāṇik, seeing his earnestness, took the child along with him to Kaṭaka."

As such talk spread, everyone came to believe that the boy had gone to study. They thought, "This child has become a pupil of a scholar, taken away for learning the Purāṇas."

At this news, mixed emotions arose in the hearts of the two elders—both joy and sorrow flooded their minds. They went to the scholar's house and inquired, "What is the nature of this journey?" The scholar replied that he had indeed taken the child with him, stirred by the

boy's curiosity. But at home, the family said, "At that time, he had gone on a military journey with his household. Whether or not he took the boy, we do not know."

The people, however, were certain in their belief: "Yes, Eknātha went along with the scholar." The grandparents, though troubled, waited patiently, hoping for his return. At last, after four long years, the scholar returned from Kaṭaka, bringing the child back with him. The old couple, upon hearing of his return, rushed to see him. They said, "You slyly lured our grandson away! You are a bold and clever Purāṇik indeed! You tempted the boy, took him afar to make him your disciple. Even if you hadn't returned him, we were ready to give our lives at your doorstep."

Hearing such words from the family, someone sent a letter to the scholar, saying, "You tricked him and took him away—that's why this curse has fallen upon us."

When the letter from the family reached the Purāṇik, the learned brāhmaṇa became deeply troubled. He pondered, "Though I acted without injustice and with good intention, why has this curse befallen me?"

He immediately informed his host, collected his dues, and prepared to depart. "Where has Eknātha gone?" he said. "This entire matter seems to have landed upon my head."

Then he remembered what Śrīnatha had once told him, marking the signs on Eknātha's soul—how he had spoken of Devagiri and his yearning to meet his Guru, Janārdana-svāmi. That sudden recollection stirred within him a firm resolve: "Let me go there and search. If he truly is at that place, I shall bring him back."

Thus resolved, the Purāṇik set out for Devagiri. Upon reaching there, he met Janārdana-pant and narrated all that had transpired. The Sadguru, upon hearing this, replied, "Indeed, Eknātha has been here all this time. He served with great devotion and has filled my heart with joy. Now, at my command, he has gone far afield on a pilgrimage. He bears not even the slightest worry and has sent a letter to his elders."

The Purāṇik then journeyed to Pratiṣṭhāna and visited Eknātha's home. There, he found the elderly grandparents seated in sorrow and conveyed to them the joyous news. He said, "Your beloved Eknātha is in Devagiri, in the presence of Janārdana-svāmi. Here, I have with me the letter written by his own hand."

Upon hearing the good tidings of their lost son, their hearts were filled with relief. "It is as though life has returned to our departing breaths. We, who were abandoned and helpless, are once more restored."

They asked him again and again to confirm the details, eagerly drinking in every word. The moment the news was believed, they brought sugar and lovingly placed it in his mouth as a token of their joy. The Purāṇik then said, "If you still doubt my words, then go to Devagiri and ask Janārdana himself. He will confirm everything."

With these words, the brāhmaṇa took his leave. The two elders, however, were left wondering, “What should we do now?”

They considered sending someone to Devagiri, but they had no wealth to afford such an arrangement. At last, they resolved, “Let us go ourselves. We shall meet Janārdana in person.”

Thus determined, they slowly began their journey, supporting each other, and made their way to Devagiri. There, they met Janārdana and poured out the tale of their sorrow, their eyes streaming with tears.

They wept, “Our dear one abandoned us and never returned. He has forgotten the home he left behind.”

Janārdana, rising with affection, embraced them both warmly. He then described with love the many noble qualities of Eknātha from his own lips. He said, “To uplift this world, Śrī Viṣṇu sent his dear devotee. Blessed is your family—made pure through this divine appearance. You see him as a child of your household, but in truth, he is none other than the very form of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga. Soon you shall witness his deeds, and all doubts will be dispelled.”

Hearing Janārdana’s words, the couple’s hearts were calmed. He then added, “Wait another six months, and your Nath will surely return home.”

He kept them with him for a month, cared for them with love, and each day served them freshly prepared meals with great devotion. He gifted them garments, ornaments, and wealth in abundance. Then, with his own hand, Janārdana wrote a letter to Eknātha and dispatched it immediately. In the letter, he wrote, “As soon as this letter reaches you, forsake your pilgrimage and return to your place of residence.”

He sealed the letter with his own handwriting and entrusted it to a swift horseman for prompt delivery. Janārdana then explained to the grandparents, “I have sent a letter through a noble man at the tīrthas. Eknātha will come to Paithan. You must now keep watch and remain alert. When our letter reaches him, he will not continue further. You need not worry. This I assure you.”

With these comforting words from Janārdana, the elders were at peace. They returned to Paithan and recounted the entire tale. They praised the nobility of Janārdana-pant to all, carefully preserving his letter and revealing its contents to those who asked. They said, “If, within six months, Eknātha unexpectedly returns, you will know it was by this cause. Be prepared to receive him.”

Meanwhile, obeying his Sadguru’s command, Eknātha had set forth on pilgrimage. In his heart and mind, Janārdana filled all space—he saw him in every creature, in all three worlds. Wherever he traveled, people were drawn to his presence. At each tīrtha, he gazed upon the deity with reverence. Wherever his heart found rest, he stayed for three days and nights.

If he found a place of true sātsanga, he would remain five nights, chanting, bathing, worshipping as his heart guided.

He visited the sacred Payoshṇī, the burning Narmadā, and the holy shrine of Mahākāleśvara at Avantī. At each site, his inner being was deeply moved. He came to Mathurā, Gokula, and the blessed land of Vṛndāvana—those sacred lands where Vaiṣṇavas, filled with divine love, sway in the Lord's name. There, he saw faithful devotees engaged in proper worship of Viṣṇu. His mind was delighted and absorbed in that place. He exclaimed, "O blessed land! How sanctified is this soil where Lord Cakradhārī played His divine games!" Seeing the residents and Vaiṣṇavas of this sacred kṣetra, he felt deep joy within. There was celebration, enthusiasm, and kīrtana of Lord Hari. All were devoted to bhajan. In their thoughts, Lord Kṛṣṇa danced constantly—his presence was alive in their hearts.

In that sacred land of Lord Viṣṇu, Śrī Eknātha spent many days. Then, offering prostrations to the deity, he continued on his journey. He reached the great kṣetra of Vārāṇasī, bathed in the holy Maṇikarṇikā, and had darśana of Lord Viśveśvara. After spending five nights there, he departed swiftly, knowing he would return again to see Janārdana.

He reached Prayāga and bathed at the confluence of the holy rivers. He had darśana of Lord Mādhava and was filled with contentment. Then, moving on to Gayā, he offered prostrations at the sacred feet of Viṣṇu. With pure devotion, he performed the rites and rejoiced inwardly. He who surrenders his body, speech, and mind to the feet of Lord Viṣṇu gains the merit of Gayāśrāddha—countless blessings beyond measure. Those devoted to Śrīhari naturally engage in righteous deeds. Their very footsteps sanctify every tīrtha they touch. The rivers Yamunā, Godāvarī, Bhāgīrathī, Kṛṣṇā, Veṇī, Sarasvatī, Narmadā, Tāpī, and Bhīmarathī—all yearn for the touch of the saints' feet. Knowing this yearning, Janārdana's heart was filled with emotion. He had thus commanded Eknātha to visit all these holy places. It was in Janārdana's own vision that this was revealed: "Eknātha now walks the path of pilgrimage, and he must visit the chief tīrthas."

He then journeyed to Gayā, Prayāga, Kāśī, and at last reached Ayodhyā. There, the kṣetra-vāsīs were absorbed in the holy name of Śrīrāma. He had darśana of the mūrtis of Śrīrāma, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, and Śatrughna. With full heart, he beheld the Lord and was fulfilled. In these Viṣṇu-kṣetras, Eknātha felt the highest delight. The Vaiṣṇavas dwelling there were full of love, and in their kīrtans they swayed, immersed in devotion. After witnessing the sacred city of Ayodhya, the saint then journeyed onwards to Badrinath, one of the most revered shrines nestled in the Himalayas. Along the way, he bathed in the sacred waters of Adi Pushkar, whose holy presence is known to dissolve the sins of the age of Kali upon mere sight. That hallowed ground, sanctified by the Lord's own steps, was rendered even more sacred by the presence of the holy Nath. As he approached the snow-clad peaks of the mighty Himalayas, he beheld the river Bhagirathi in her majestic flow. There, at a lofty and rugged mountain pass, stood a jagged cliff — vast, steep, and awe-inspiring — a place beyond the grasp of ordinary perception.

Yet, undeterred by danger or hardship, the saint took shelter in a cave nearby. Sitting quietly within its embrace, he crossed to the other side, driven not by fear but by a profound spiritual fearlessness. His heart brimmed with divine joy as his eyes finally beheld the temple of Badrinarayan. With full prostration, he bowed in utter devotion, offering homage to the divine form.

Just as the two divine sages, Nara and Narayana, are inseparable, without distinction or duality, so too does the true devotee, through unwavering love, magnify the divine glory within himself. The residents of that holy region spoke fondly and reverently of Lord Hari's divine pastimes. They recalled how Lord Krishna had once sent Uddhava to Badrikashram, and ever since, the tradition of divine remembrance had remained unbroken.

In that sacred region, the saints guided the faithful with divine vision, and the pious souls followed the same divine path. Having renounced all worldly imagination and identity, such souls were verily liberated while still embodied. After offering due homage to Badrinath, the saint promptly departed, journeying swiftly towards Dwarka. In the solitude of the forests along the way, he immersed himself in the remembrance of Lord Hari.

His mind was fastened firmly to the Lord's name and form, such that all awareness of the body fell away. The entire cosmos appeared as the form of Lord Janardana, and the saint himself immersed into that divine presence. Thus absorbed, he arrived at the city of Dwarka, bathed along the banks of the river Gomti, and felt a deep, inner contentment. With reverent haste, he approached the temple of Lord Krishna, where he offered full-bodied prostrations in loving devotion. Gazing upon the divine deity of Shri Krishna, his heart overflowed with joy. He remained in Dwarka for a month, observing the rituals of worship three times a day, and delighting in the hearing of sacred praises.

Feeling called toward the southern pilgrimage sites, the saint turned from Dwarka. Journeying southward, he reached the village of Narsi Mehta, and there beheld the ancient form of the Lord once worshipped by the great devotee. His heart moved by love, he took in that sacred place with reverence and recognition. In this way, visiting the northern shrines, beholding the twelve jyotirlingas scattered across the land, and offering himself at the sacred seven cities, he danced inwardly with joy and devotion.

Continuing his pilgrimage, he arrived at the sacred site of Pratishthan, where he bathed in the Godavari and then paid his respects to the Lord of Pimpaleshwar. The people of the village, recognizing him, gathered around with curiosity and reverence. To avoid disturbance, the saint quietly remained in the temple from the early hours of the morning. At midday, feeling the need for food, he ventured out into the holy precincts, accepting whatever sustenance he came across with complete contentment. Having conquered his tongue and senses, he was indifferent to taste — sweet or bitter — for he saw no difference between honor and dishonor, friend or enemy; all appeared to him as forms of Janardana.

In such a state, while journeying to the holy places, the saint entered the village — and there, quite suddenly, came upon his aged grandparents, whom he had not seen for many years. Recognizing him, they offered heartfelt salutations in their minds. They desired to announce his identity to the villagers, but he, not wishing to be drawn back into worldly ties, refrained.

"This worldly life is filled with peril," he thought. "Should I fall again into this illusion, I would disobey my Sadguru's command. Though I remain in the south, I must journey forward with haste." Thus, choosing inward silence, he did not reveal himself.

His grandparents, seeing him up close, began to observe familiar signs — marks and features from his childhood. He had left them long ago as a child, and many years had since passed. Now, as a grown man, doubts and emotions surged.

They spoke with trembling words, “You left us for our sake, did you not? How could your heart be so resolute?” Their eyes welled with tears. The aged couple tried in many ways to persuade him. Villagers gathered and many confirmed, “He is indeed our Nath.”

Some were certain. Others, unsure. Still others expressed doubts, saying, “The memories of the old may deceive. Who can know what fate has truly woven?”

The saint, however, gave no clear reply — neither denying nor affirming. As he turned to leave, his grandparents ran to him, clasping him tightly. They produced a letter — a command written in the very hand of Janardana — and placed it before him. Recognizing the script, the saint bowed deeply, reflecting upon its meaning, and sat down at that very spot. Just as the Sage Agastya’s command once caused the Vindhya mountain to bow to the earth, so too did the sight of that letter cause the saint to sit humbly upon the ground.

The place where he sat had previously been uninhabited, yet now villagers urged him to come stay in their homes. But detached from all ties, and immersed in the divine, he remained silent, speaking to none. To him, the ever-changing world appeared as mere illusion. He saw all as Janardana. Thus, his body was unaffected by heat or cold — he had already transcended the body.

One pious devotee, inspired, brought offerings for the saint. In accordance with divine will, the food was prepared and lovingly presented. The saint accepted it and partook of it with devotion. For three days he remained at that spot. His aged grandparents, still overcome with emotion, returned often to behold him. Witnessing his unwavering stillness amid wind and weather, some compassionate devotees of the village constructed a thatched shelter. There, in that quiet refuge, the saint performed his devotional singing and contemplation with deep love. His saintly demeanor, adorned with the signs of inner purity, astonished all who saw him.

They exclaimed, “Such renunciation in one so young! He cannot be a mere mortal. Surely, this is a divine personality!” Their praises resounded, and throngs gathered to behold him. Despite having no scriptural texts before him, the saint spoke profound, poetic verses,

weaving together stories of Lord Hari. From his lips emerged divine hymns, each filled with grace.

Once, there was no singer for the chorus during a kirtan. Sensing the need, Lord Panduranga Himself assumed the form of a brahmin and stood behind the saint. As the saint sang, the Lord caught each word in song, keeping the rhythm with hand-held cymbals, his voice sweet and melodious. The Supreme Lord — beloved of Rukmini and master of all worlds — had taken up residence in the saint's heart, and now stood outside, lending support. Yet none recognized Him, though He was clearly visible.

Those who listened to Eknath's kirtan were transported to states beyond the senses. Even those merely passing by and hearing the sounds felt a shift within. Such was the saint's divine influence. The villagers spoke among themselves: "This Nath is a dear servant of the Lord Himself, come to uplift the world!" His kirtan captivated every heart. No one wished to miss it. People flocked to hear, their minds drawn irresistibly.

In time, the villagers, now filled with reverence, built a grand temple in his honor, sparing no expense. Within its vast courtyards and chambers, they gave Eknath a residence. There, content and at peace, he remained, offering daily worship and hosting sacred meals.

His grandparents, now deeply fulfilled, brought their family deities and settled there with him. Food and clothing were offered freely by devotees, for where the Lord's friend resides, abundance flows effortlessly. On every Ekadashi, devotional gatherings were held throughout the four quarters of the day. People arrived in large numbers to chant the holy name.

One day, during the month of Shravan, the saint announced, "Let us celebrate the appearance day of Lord Krishna with great love and devotion!" The community accepted his words joyfully.

A wealthy merchant brought many supplies. The temple was cleaned and decorated, and a divine cradle was prepared for the Lord. Some Brahmins journeyed to Devagiri to meet Janardan Swami, the saint's guru, and shared with him all that had transpired. Upon hearing, the guru's heart swelled with joy — like a father hearing of his son's triumph, or a mother seeing her child cured of a long affliction. Filled with bliss, the noble Janardan Swami set out to meet Eknath, bringing his disciples and household with him.

At home, the preparations for Krishna's birth were already in full swing. Taking all the festive materials with them, they began their journey with loving haste. With grand banners waving and the sacred dindis moving in rhythm, the air echoed with the powerful cadence of drums and cymbals. Upon majestic Garuda-mandated seats, offerings were borne with utmost

reverence. An atmosphere of divine celebration engulfed the procession as it advanced with great pomp and devotion.

To fulfill the sacred duty of feeding Brahmins and saints, the necessary offerings and materials were carefully gathered and sent ahead on bullock carts, well-packed in sacks, with urgency and care. Soon after, the revered Janardana arrived at Paithan and made his way toward the dwelling of Sant Eknath. As he approached the doorway, his eyes beheld a wondrous sight—standing in the form of a doorkeeper was none other than Lord Dattatreya Himself, radiant and divine.

Clad in a doorkeeper's form yet unmistakably divine, Dattatreya stood by the grand entrance, bearing a trident in his hand like Lord Shiva, the destroyer of Tripura. Upon beholding Him, Janardana instantly recognized the Jagadguru with tear-filled eyes. At once, he prostrated fully upon the ground, offering his salutations with deep love, and was warmly embraced.

Lord Dattatreya then addressed Janardana tenderly, declaring, "Sant Eknath is dear servant of Lord Panduranga. Therefore, out of love, I have chosen to remain stationed at this grand entrance, guarding it with devotion."

Thus speaking, the Lord, with utmost gentleness, shed His divine form and adopted the guise of a humble man. He swiftly informed Eknath, "Your Guru has arrived, accompanied by his entire family from Devagiri."

Upon hearing these blessed tidings, joy overflowed in Eknath's heart. Without delay, he rushed to greet his Guru, and as soon as they met, he offered his full prostration. Embracing his beloved disciple with affection, Janardana stepped into Eknath's home.

Eknath then seated his Sadguru with great reverence, washed his feet with his own hands, and joyfully consumed the holy water as sacred tirtha, experiencing a deep sense of divine bliss in his heart.

Bringing forth all the articles for worship with devotion, he began the Guru's puja. He applied fragrant sandalwood paste, adorned the Lord with garlands of fresh flowers, and offered incense, lamps, and the traditional five-fold arati. With deep spiritual love, he venerated the Guru as a living deity.

Once the worship was complete, Eknath recounted to his Guru all the events, from beginning to end. Though Janardana was already aware of everything through divine insight, he chose to listen, allowing the expression of love to unfold. That very day, the house was lit with enthusiasm for the celebration of Krishna Janmashtami. Auspicious instruments played sacred tunes as preparations for the Lord's abhisheka (ritual bath) and worship commenced. A beautiful deity of Lord Krishna was installed within a decorated canopy. People from all around the holy land of Paithan flocked for darshan. Various delicacies and offerings were prepared and presented to the Brahmins with devotion.

Seated before Lord Janardana, Eknath began singing kirtans. The spiritual joy of that moment was so immense that even words fell short to describe it. The divine fervor stilled the tongue, unable to contain the ecstasy.

In the guise of a Brahmin, Lord Panduranga Himself took up the dhrupad (a style of devotional singing) and began dancing with anklets tied to His feet, intoxicated in the love of His devotee.

The words emerging from Eknath's mouth were instantly repeated by the mysterious Brahmin behind him, as though they were echoing the original verses. Onlookers were astounded and remarked, "This Brahmin following behind is repeating every verse—he seems to draw the entire narrative from within himself!"

They began to whisper among themselves, "Surely, these two share the same spiritual essence. Their bond must have been forged in previous lifetimes. It is our great fortune to witness their divine union."

During the day, Brahmin-feeding continued, and by night, the divine songs of Lord Hari filled the air. The devoted citizens of Paithan were completely enraptured by the kirtans. On Navami, the ninth day, an abundance of sweet preparations was made, and a great feast was organized. The devout Vaishnavas concluded their fasts with love, hearts full and spirits elevated.

Soon began the joyful enactment of Krishna's childhood pastimes. The house filled with divine mischief and innocent play. Some portrayed crooked little calves and curious companions, mimicking the Lord's divine leelas in myriad playful forms.

"Uncle" put on a frightening mask, playing games of hide and seek. Eknath took on the role of Yashoda, churning butter while young Krishna, in his mischief, came to steal it.

The games of ball, spinning tops, and swings all unfolded in accordance with the playful stories of the Bhagavata. The divine atmosphere was heightened by Eknath's creative imagination and joyful storytelling.

He introduced many dramatic characters, spoke poetic verses with grace and charm, and adorned the stage with wondrous performances. In the midst of this, the Brahmin—truly the Lord Himself—performed the dhrupad masterfully.

As He sang and danced, the listeners were overcome with joy, their hearts melted, and laughter bubbled up from within. Janardana explained to the audience the deeper meanings behind the six major philosophical schools and the thirty-six heterodox sects. He revealed the true import of their doctrines with clarity, presenting the refined nectar of truth.

To the ignorant, the surface meanings were delightful and captivating. But to the wise, the profound spiritual truths shone through, expressed in refined and tasteful speech.

Finally, Lord Krishna's deity was lovingly placed in His cradle. Aarti was performed with devotion, and the prasad (blessed offerings) were distributed with joy.

Then Janardana turned to Eknath and inquired about the mysterious Brahmin who had been following him. "Who is this man, singing dhrupads with such mastery? Tell me his name and where he is from."

Janardana continued, "He sings with such perfection, his manner so noble, his song imbued with glory. Truly, the two of you seem as one soul. There is no distinction I perceive between you."

"It is only because of your immense merit," he said to Eknath, "that you have earned his company. His presence enlivens the kirtan with divine love and grants peace to all who hear it. May this union of yours last for life," he added. "Through it, many souls shall attain salvation by simply listening to your devotional singing."

Eknath, curious and reverent, then turned to the Brahmin and said, "Who are you, O noble one? What is your name and where do you dwell? Kindly reveal this to us."

To this, the Lord—Rukmini's beloved—smiled and replied, "I have no fixed abode. Whenever I see sincere devotion and love, I reside with such devotees. This body is known by the name 'Vithoba.' I have neither wife nor child. I know no scholarship, and I possess no formal skill in music. Yet, by the power of love, I join in these dhrupads and remain content with just a handful of food, provided I am near you."

Hearing these words, Janardana was filled with immense satisfaction. Yet, a thought lingered—was this Brahmin truly just a man? Could he be, in fact, the very consort of Lakshmi, Lord Himself?

Thus passed fourteen blessed days of Brahmin-feeding. All offerings had been made, and now Janardana prepared to return to Devagiri. Before departing, he respectfully approached Eknath's aged grandparents.

With his head bowed at their feet, he offered a humble request: "Only one descendant remains of the noble Bhanudas line—your son, Eknath. He stayed here out of obedience to my command, but his heart is always detached. If he is to marry and embrace the householder's life, he may do so now. It would ease your worries and carry forward the blessed lineage. Please, ask this of him, and let his union be our joy."

Hearing these words of compassion, Janardana called Eknath and spoke words like nectar: "Even if the bride is chosen of your own will, still, accept the marital bond with grace. The householder's path is not a hindrance—it is, indeed, the most exalted of the four ashramas when lived rightly. Through discipline, one governs the senses and performs one's duties with joy. By sharing food with guests, Brahmins, and the hungry, one earns immense merit. With sincere devotion, offer worship to Vishnu, sing his praises, and ever remember His name with love."

Receiving the Guru's command, Eknath silently bowed his head at his Guru's feet, accepting the path destined by fate. He remained inwardly detached, yet obeyed without resistance. Then, Janardana, with his family, began his journey back to Devagiri. At parting, he blessed Eknath, saying, "May you bring joy to your elders and live ever in the light of your Dharma."

Though parted in body, Janardana's form remained enshrined in the temple of Eknath's heart. Not for a moment did the inner connection fade. The Guru's love and grace stayed ever with his disciple.

Thus concludes the fifteenth chapter of Bhaktalilamrit, a sacred stream of divine nectar. This chapter, like the others, fulfills the heartfelt desires of all devoted listeners, pouring forth the sweet rasa of love and truth.

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Chapter 16

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (With reverence to Śrī Gaṇeśa, let this sacred narration unfold)

Victory to the Lord who reclines upon Ananta—the infinite serpent—whose being is immeasurable and boundless, who transcends all names and forms, who is untouched by the three guṇas. He is the cherished deity of Kāmadeva, the god of love, who was once burnt by the fire of Śiva's wrath. Such a compassionate Lord ever protects His one-pointed devotees with unwavering grace. He is the Lord of the Pannaga-serpent realm, the destroyer of sorrows. To the daughter of the ocean, He is the very breath of life. He dwells in the cosmic ocean, lies upon the couch of Śeṣa, and purifies the fallen. He is an ocean of mercy. Residing in Vaikuṇṭha, He is exceedingly generous, for His presence permeates the worlds of the cosmos. Though beyond name, the sages call Him Parabrahman—He is the Supreme Lord, the ever-blissful One who is eternally awake to Truth. He is the lifter of Govardhana, the protector of the cowherds, the beloved of the gopīs, the very form of divine beauty. He dwells among the senses of the cows and is adored by renunciants and sages who proclaim, "He alone is the One we seek!"

Now, let Him eternally abide within my heart and mind, and grant me the remembrance of His divine name. Let Him inspire the narration of Śrī Bhakta-Līlāmṛta, whose sacred nectar of stories stirs the listener's heart with waves of love.

At the close of the previous chapter, it was revealed how Janārdana-svāmi instructed Eknātha to embrace the household life with spiritual resolve, and to walk the path of devotion while living in harmony with worldly duties. Thus, accepting this divine command, Eknātha departed for Devagiri. Now begins the narration of what transpired next—listen, O pious and devoted souls, to the wondrous story that follows.

The grandparents of Eknātha, though aged and full of years, were burdened day and night with concern. "If only," they said, "a suitable bride could be found for our Eknātha, then our hearts would rejoice upon witnessing his marriage before our own eyes."

Even as they spoke thus to one another, the devotees around them gave words of reassurance: "The Lord Himself will aid your wish. Do not harbor even a speck of worry."

Though Śrīnātha (Eknātha) was ever detached in mind, whether he would marry or not remained uncertain. Yet, this anxiety was dissolved by the grace of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga, who fulfilled their heartfelt prayer. The word of Janārdana-svāmi was firm, and Eknātha never strayed from it. As the auspicious days of marriage approached, the elderly couple began making many preparations, inspired with hope. The words of assurance spoken by the devotees brought peace to the hearts of the grandparents. Not many days passed before the destined day of marriage was upon them.

In a certain village lived a learned brāhmaṇa. His daughter had reached marriageable age, and though he sought a worthy husband for her, no suitable alliance had yet arisen. Burdened with worry, the brāhmaṇa fell asleep one night, and lo! In a dream appeared the Lord of Paṇḍharī, who spoke to him with divine clarity.

“O noble one,” said the Lord, “in the sacred town of Pratiṣṭhāna, near the banks of the Godavari, resides a pious devotee of Viṣṇu, known as Eknātha. Go there, and offer your adorned daughter to him in marriage.”

Having seen this divine vision granted by Rukmiṇī's consort, the brāhmaṇa awoke with wonder and awe in his heart. At once, he shared the dream with his wife and departed for Pratiṣṭhāna in person. As he reached the town, he began inquiring among the locals, “Can someone please tell me where Eknātha resides?”

Upon being shown the way to Eknātha’s home, the brāhmaṇa came forth and revealed the vision granted by Rukmiṇī’s Lord, Pāṇḍuraṅga. Eknātha, too, shared the same vision, confirming the Lord’s wish. The bride’s father then respectfully bowed to Eknātha’s grandparents and said with humility, “For the sake of your grandson, I offer my daughter in marriage.”

Pleased with his words, the elders accepted the proposal. The family astrologer was called, and the horoscopes were matched. Upon examining the charts, it was found that all thirty-six attributes aligned perfectly. Auspicious dates were then fixed with satisfaction on both sides. The bride’s father offered a betel nut to the groom’s family and said, “Now I must return to make preparations. With my daughter and kin, I shall soon come to Pratiṣṭhāna.”

He joyfully departed, saying, “Giving my daughter in marriage at such a sacred place will bestow immense merit.” And thus, he returned to his home. He then said to his wife, “Our daughter has found a most extraordinary groom. A devout Vaiṣṇava, a spiritual hero, he appears as though the very incarnation of the Divine.”

Content at heart, he began preparing the necessary items for the wedding in his own home.

Meanwhile, in Pratiṣṭhāna, the news of the forthcoming wedding was heard and received with delight. The town was abuzz with joy, for Eknātha was known as a descendant of the venerable sage Śrīcakrapāṇi and the shining light of the Nātha lineage. As his fame grew, it filled his grandparents with awe and contentment. Sitting in their home, the elderly couple pondered, “The ceremony is near, yet many of our relatives dwell afar.” They reflected that their kin were living in the province of Vijayāpura, about seventeen yojanas away. A letter had to be sent to invite them.

Among those relatives was Uddhava, the son of Eknātha’s uncle—a deeply devout Vaiṣṇava. They addressed a wedding invitation in his name, requesting him to come. In addition, they wrote letters to other close friends and well-wishers, beautifully adorned with kumkum and charm, each invitation carrying heartfelt sentiment.

The letters spoke thus: “We are aged now, and this will be the final celebration in our home. Come, all of you, with your families. We await your arrival with eager hearts.”

They entrusted the invitations to a reliable messenger, who set forth with haste. In Pratiṣṭhāna, the devotees zealously joined in making arrangements for the grand occasion.

To one who is united in friendship with Śrīhari, the world itself offers support. Upon hearing of the wedding, all efforts in every household became fruitful. No lack or scarcity could hinder their joy.

The invitations reached the relatives in Vijayāpura, who received them with great joy. Uddhava, wise and filled with Vaiṣṇava spirit, gathered all the needed provisions and, along with his household, journeyed to Pratiṣṭhāna. Upon meeting the aged elders, Uddhava was overwhelmed with joy. He bowed to Eknātha and embraced him with love. There was heartfelt delight in that meeting. As they embraced, tears welled in their eyes. Their hearts, filled with divine love, found great peace. Witnessing this beautiful scene of affection, all present were moved to wonder.

Meanwhile, the bride’s father, though distant, began collecting a great amount of food supplies. He loaded them onto oxen and quickly sent them ahead. Both families now prepared fine garments and ornaments. Accompanied by the wedding party, the bride’s side began their journey to Pratiṣṭhāna. Upon reaching the grand home of the groom, they marvelled at its spaciousness and settled there with their household. The wedding was to take place at dawn. Auspicious rice grains (akṣata) were distributed across the town, announcing the blessed event.

Then came the sacred occasion of Deva-pratiṣṭhā—the ceremonial consecration of the Lord—and the Brahmin-feast, where invited brāhmaṇas were served with devotion. Relatives and family friends offered gifts as tokens of affection, while joyful music and auspicious sounds of mangala-vādya (festive instruments) echoed in the air. The bride and groom were anointed with turmeric and scented unguents in keeping with ancient traditions.

Exquisite preparations were underway in both marriage pavilions, with a variety of delectable dishes being cooked in accordance with sacred rites. After feeding the brāhmaṇas with respect, annaśānti (ritual food offering and sanctification) was performed with great devotion.

On the groom's side, Uddhava, full of love and unwavering determination, led the arrangements with steady hands and a joyous heart. The devotees of the town honored his word and followed his guidance with trust. Hearing Uddhava’s suggestions, everyone acted in accordance, for his presence was both practical and inspired by faith.

Householders, elders, and the bride’s father gathered with their families. With the resonant sounds of auspicious music, the groom proceeded for the pūjā (wedding rituals). Offerings for the ceremonial display (rukhovat) were carried by the bridal procession, and gifts of

garments and ornaments were presented to the groom before he was led with dignity to the bridal home.

After the madhuparka (ritual welcoming and offering), the priests held the antahpaṭa—the sacred curtain—between the bride and groom. Chanting solemnly, they called out: "Be alert, be focused—let the mind dwell on Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa!"

With sacred verses, the priest performed the wedding rituals. As the divine moment of union between prakṛti and puruṣa (nature and spirit) occurred, every heart was filled with joy. The lājahoma—offering of puffed rice into the sacred fire—was performed symbolically, and dakṣiṇā (offerings) were distributed to all.

Then followed the rituals of sammukha, tailavaṇa, airanī-pūjana, and even the traditional ḍhedā-nācavaṇa (folk dances). After the ceremonial entry into the home and Lakṣmī-pūjana, all household rites were completed with reverence.

For five full days, the wedding celebrations continued as per dharma and tradition. Gifts, garments, and offerings were given to all with such abundance that none felt a sense of lacking.

Thus, the bride's father performed the sacred act of kanyādāna—giving away his daughter in marriage—and returned peacefully to his home. The grandparents, beholding the noble daughter-in-law, felt a deep contentment in their hearts.

From the province of Vijayapura had come many relatives for the wedding. After enjoying the ceremony, they returned to their homes filled with immense joy. Only Uddhava remained behind at Pratiṣṭhāna, absorbed in the loving service of Śrīnātha. With firm devotion in body, speech, and mind, he remained ever near the Lord. Without being told, Uddhava intuitively understood what was needed and acted upon it. He never burdened Śrīnātha with worry, for his heart was overflowing with love.

His wife, Gīrijābāī, was a woman of excellent virtues. She too, joined wholeheartedly in the daily service of Śrīnātha with love and sincerity. Though young in age, she was wise in the ways of the household, and always followed the boundaries set by her elders. Her noble qualities brought peace and delight to the hearts of the elderly couple. They joyfully exclaimed, "By the grace of Janārdana-svāmi, the longing of our eyes has been fulfilled!"

Without asking, people came offering an abundance of garments and food. Brāhmaṇas were fed in plenty, and even the hungry and destitute were welcomed and nourished. In matters of annadāna (food donation), no one considered caste or community—Janārdana had filled the world with his compassion, manifesting kindness toward all beings.

In earlier days, the saint Bhānudāsa had lovingly installed a mūrti of Pāṇḍuraṅga in his home shrine, and Śrīnātha now worshipped that very same deity with his own hands, offering service with deep devotion and love. Twice each day, after two praharas, the brāhmaṇas were fed. In the third prahara, the Purāṇas were recited, and by nightfall, kīrtana—devotional

singing—was held without fail. Men and women of the town flocked each day with love to listen. As the days passed, the fame and glory of the household grew ever more. Such grand celebrations, the elders had not seen in their lifetime. But, as all that has a beginning must find its close, their earthly lives came to a peaceful end, and they departed for the celestial world of Vaikuṇṭha.

Śrīnātha himself performed their last rites with his own hands and ensured their sadgati—auspicious onward journey. By doing so, he exemplified the ideal conduct for the sake of society, although he was inwardly untouched by dualities of action and inaction.

At that time, Śrī Viṭṭhala, assuming the form of a brāhmaṇa, would appear and sing kīrtanas in the house every day. That same Lord—who remains unfathomable to even Brahmā and other gods—had now become a constant presence in their midst. While yogis strive through intense aṣṭāṅga-sādhana, many are unable to attain even a glimpse of the Lord's form. Yet, for the sake of Eknātha's devotion, Viṭṭhala Himself picked up the ṭāḷa (cymbals) and sang along with joy.

At this time, someone arrived from Devagiri bearing grave news. Hearing it, they informed Śrīnātha: "Janārdana-svāmi has left his mortal body and ascended to the eternal realm of Vaikuṇṭha."

Upon hearing of his Sadguru's passing, Śrīnātha felt no sorrow or regret, for his heart was ever immersed in his Guru Janārdana. Then, calling Uddhava aside in solitude, Śrīnātha, with his own lips, lovingly instructed him: "It is now certain that the ṣaṣṭhyutsava—the sixtieth-day observance—must be held. Begin the preparations for it with your fullest devotion."

At that moment, Uddhava humbly bowed his head at the feet of the Master, Śrīnātha, and earnestly inquired, "O Nātha, tell me the reason for observing the Ṣaṣṭhī festival. Why should this celebration be held?" Perceiving his sincere intent, the Lord, with divine affection, began to narrate the deeper truth.

"Uddhava," said the Śrīnātha, "Ṣrī Janārdana Svāmī's divine birth anniversary falls on the sixth day of the dark fortnight of Phālguna. On that very day, he had a vision of Lord Dattātreya, and on that same tithi, he was graced with complete divine favor. Furthermore, it was also on this very tithi that Janārdana Svāmī relinquished his mortal frame. Thus, four sacred events are tied to this day, and you shall witness more in time to come."

The Lord instructed that proper offerings and arrangements for feeding the Brāhmaṇas should be made promptly. With reverence, Uddhava responded affirmatively, offered obeisance, and went about fulfilling the command. Some resources came unasked, while others he sought with effort. He secured a promissory note pledging seven hundred silver coins from a merchant. Uddhava signed the note in the name of Śrī Eknātha and had the entire matter recorded with a due date clearly mentioned.

With loving care and devoted effort, the preparations were made. On the sacred Ṣaṣṭhī, the festival was joyously organized. An invitation was extended to the entire sacred area, and delicious dishes were prepared to perfection. All those who were devoted, sincere, and full of love, came forward to serve in various ways. Everyone worked joyously, without burdening another, driven only by the inner warmth of devotion.

A grand dindī procession was then organized, and they marched in unison towards the banks of the Gaṅgā. The air resonated with the sweet sounds of cymbals, vīṇās, and mṛdaṅgas, accompanied by lively kīrtanas adorned with garlands. Banners, Garuḍa insignias, and auspicious trumpets played, while the Vaiṣṇavas chanted victorious praises of the Lord. The joyous sound echoed through the very sky.

The dindī was thus paraded, and by midday, all returned home. Brāhmaṇas bathed and gathered in orderly rows for the meal. Śrīnātha Himself lovingly washed the feet of the brāhmaṇas and then sanctified that water as holy tīrtha and partook of it with heartfelt joy. Among them were steadfast devotees, fixed in one-pointed bhakti, who gently touched their own eyes to their thumb as a sign of reverence. To them, no deity was greater than the brāhmaṇa himself, so deep was their devotion.

With His own divine hands, the Lord anointed them with sandal paste, offered them basil leaves and fresh flowers, and honored them with offerings of fine sweets served in well-prepared dishes. Ghee and other sacred items were served in proper vessels, and the entire meal was prepared with precision and purity. In all, Janārdana was the one being offered to through the sanctified act of feeding everyone with love.

After completing the rituals, the brāhmaṇas began their meal, while the name of Viṭṭhala was joyously chanted in every direction. Whatever each guest desired was lovingly served to them. Śrīnātha Himself stood with folded hands, requesting all to eat slowly and with contentment. Once all were fully satisfied, they washed their hands and received betel leaves and dakṣiṇā as offerings before departing peacefully.

Later, Viṭṭhala, Uddhava, Eknātha, and the householder who had managed the festival all dined together at the final sitting, their hearts overflowing with bliss. That night, Śrīnātha performed kīrtana, and countless devotees gathered to listen. His words, soaked in divine love and wisdom, were like a sacred feast, leaving nothing wanting in spiritual delight.

In this way, the night passed, and on the following day, the festival of Saptamī was celebrated in the same divine manner. On Aṣṭamī, the festive tradition of Gopālkāla was conducted with great enthusiasm. The dindī procession again went towards the Gaṅgā and, upon reaching the banks, joined a large crowd of pilgrims all united in singing the holy name and shouting jubilant praises.

The ritual of Kālā was performed as prescribed, and sacred prasāda was distributed to all. That night, the dramatic enactments began, eagerly awaited by the gathered devotees. The

sacred play was executed perfectly, and eventually, the divine consort of Rukmiṇī, Lord Kṛṣṇa, was ceremoniously put to rest.

With the break of dawn, the saints and sages were honored in due manner. Thus, the Ṣaṣṭhī festival was completed in this sacred land, bringing joy to all. People proclaimed, "For the deliverance of the world, Śrīnātha has manifested here." In this holy land of Pratiṣṭhāna, a place of profound Vedic learning, where strict brāhmaṇas abide, the Lord appeared in saguna form to reveal the path of bhakti to all.

However, the merchant who had issued the loan grew restless and demanded repayment from Uddhava, despite the latter having duly provided the promissory note. As the due date arrived, the merchant insisted on receiving the money.

Uddhava responded, "I have the note in hand. I will bring it to your house. Please trust me and allow some time."

Though he spoke with sincerity, the merchant was crooked at heart. "When unsolicited wealth comes your way, you indulge in grand offerings at home," he taunted. "You've abandoned household life and dance about in kīrtanas like madmen, misleading the entire community. I can no longer tolerate this nonsense," he muttered and returned home, seething.

At that time, Eknātha was performing his evening bath and prayers. The merchant arrogantly declared, "If you eat food before repaying my money, may Paṇḍuraṅga Himself be witness to my oath." With that, he departed.

Due to this vow, Eknātha refrained from partaking in the offerings made to the Lord or from serving the brāhmaṇas. He remained fasting that day. Uddhava and Girijā-satī too observed the fast. The sun set, yet the promised sum could not be arranged.

Despite Uddhava's best efforts, not a coin could be procured. A quarter of the night passed, and all three remained without food. Seeing their condition, the Lord of Paṇḍharpur could no longer bear it. How could the beloved of Rukmiṇī tolerate that His devoted followers remained hungry?

Assuming Uddhava's form, Śrīhari Himself proceeded to the merchant's home. Knocking at the door, He called out urgently, "Open up! Come quickly!"

Opening the door, the merchant invited Him inside, asking, "Why have you come so late at night? What brings you here?"

The Lord, in the guise of Uddhava, replied, "I've come to collect the promissory note. Kindly return it. You may also receive the full amount with interest now itself."

The merchant responded, "How can I verify the details at night? The account books and the note are both at the shop. Come in the morning, and I'll return them to you."

To this, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha replied in solemn tones: “Listen, O faithful one! If you were going to disregard the note anyway, why did you place such a heavy oath upon My devotee? His fasting has left Me restless. My very soul is agitated.”

These divine words stirred the merchant's heart with deep remorse. He immediately led the Lord to the shop and examined the accounts. The repayment amount was calculated and received. Yet, to his astonishment, all the coins bore the same mark – a single seal that amazed him deeply.

Having settled the debt, the Lord tore the promissory note with His own hands and returned home, hiding the note in the sacred books.

Back at the merchant’s home, sleep eluded him. Regret pierced his heart. “I insulted the Lord, took a sacred oath, and then dined peacefully!” he cried. “I tormented a saint, valuing perishable wealth over the eternal.” These thoughts consumed him as the first rays of dawn appeared.

He quickly washed his face and rushed to Śrīnātha’s abode. Falling at His feet with full prostration, he confessed, “I am truly your offender.”

Śrīnātha gently replied, “Such is the conduct of a true householder. Without settling debts, I shall never accept food.”

As soon as he heard these words, the merchant was struck with wonder. His mind was astounded, and he stood speechless. Uddhava then said to him, “You came here bringing goods and hoping to collect dues—did you think to meet the Lord of Rukmiṇī through a commercial exchange?”

“Then why,” he continued, “have you still kept the Lord fasting? If this is so, speak plainly to the Master without further delay.”

But Uddhava would not speak harshly or falsely to the man. He refrained from any such words. Suddenly, the merchant was overcome by a wave of truthfulness. With heartfelt sincerity, he rushed to Uddhava and confessed all, taking a vow upon himself. The entry in the account book was indeed cleared; the mystery in his heart was now fully understood. Uddhava looked upon the merchant and said, “Blessed is your devotion, so full of love! In coming to conduct worldly dealings with the Master, you have in truth been granted the direct presence of the Lord Himself.”

“But now,” he added, “do not disclose this divine secret to anyone. Let it remain hidden.”

Bowing deeply in reverence to Uddhava, the merchant returned swiftly to his home. That very day, when Śrīnātha had completed the worship of the Deity and was serving food to a group of brāhmaṇas, the fast of Girijābāī, observed on account of Uddhava, was also broken—thus the day turned auspicious.

Meanwhile, dressed as a brāhmaṇa, with divine ornaments adorning His limbs, Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga took on the form of a dhrupad singer. In the midst of the kīrtan, He radiated wondrous beauty. The entire world was drawn to Him, eager to hear that celestial music.

In order to exalt the glory of Eknātha still further, the Supreme Person Himself had thus resolved. Donning the attire of a brāhmaṇa, the very Soul of the Universe immersed Himself in loving song during the kīrtan, increasing the tide of bhakti.

Twelve years passed in this way, a full era of tapas unfolded. What more came to pass thereafter—those events the saints have tenderly narrated.

In the sacred land of Paṇḍharpur, a steadfast Vaiṣṇava devotee was performing intense devotional practices. His sole desire was to behold the direct form of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga. Many years passed in this longing. His lips constantly repeated the holy names, while his mind held no other worldly desire. One night, in the stillness of slumber, the beloved Lord of Rukmiṇī appeared to him in a dream and gently spoke: "You long for My darśan in direct form. But I am presently absorbed in activities at Pratiṣṭhāna. There, My most intimate devotee Eknātha sings My praises with unwavering devotion."

"Taking the form of a brāhmaṇa," the Lord continued, "I Myself sing the dhrupad in his gatherings. The people of the world call Me by the name Viṭhobā. Go there without delay."

"Go to Eknātha's home in Pratiṣṭhāna, and you shall see Me directly," He instructed.

When the devotee awoke, having seen such a vision in his dream, his heart was filled with wonder. Without hesitation, he travelled to Pratiṣṭhāna and made his way to the house of Eknātha. Inquiring about Viṭhobā, he sought out the brāhmaṇa and eagerly rushed to meet him. The moment he bowed down with full prostration, the brāhmaṇa transformed before his eyes—Rukmiṇī's beloved revealed Himself in His true form! The Lord appeared in His four-armed form, radiantly divine, crowned with a jewel-encrusted diadem that dazzled the eye. His face shone with celestial beauty; earrings sparkled upon His ears. Around His neck hung the Kaustubha gem and the garland of Vaijayantī. His yellow garments glowed with a brilliance that defied description. His limbs were gentle and beautifully formed. His hands rested at His waist in graceful posture. Every part of His form was exquisitely symmetrical, a vision of unsurpassed beauty. Along with this devotee, several other Vaiṣṇavas had also arrived. All of them were granted the divine darśan of the Lord at that very moment. Having bestowed His vision upon them, the Lord vanished from their sight.

Those who had come from Paṇḍharī began glorifying the Master with tears of devotion. They declared, "Blessed are you, O Vaiṣṇava bhakta! You beheld Viṣṇu in His direct avatār. The Lord of Paṇḍharpur Himself, taking on the garb of a brāhmaṇa, sang the dhrupad in person."

Now Viṭhobā, who had appeared as the brāhmaṇa, became invisible. Eknātha stood motionless, his heart overwhelmed with divine astonishment. He said, "O Life of the

Universe, You have come to me, worn by my humble glorification. May Your sacred name never be diminished by unworthy association."

Such was the pure and steadfast love Eknātha held—that the Lord must indeed fulfil the prayers of His servant. The Vedas cannot fathom the depth of such a relationship, yet the Supreme becomes the helper of His bhaktas. The debt that Paṇḍharīnath owed to His devotee had now been repaid. Word of this miraculous episode spread among the people. For twelve years, the Lord had sung the dhrupad, and now the true purpose of that act had been revealed.

Just as the essence of nectar lies hidden within the bud of a flower, but releases its fragrance when the breeze stirs it—so too, the glorious lives of saints are gently told among the loving hearts of devotees. Humility, freedom from pride, simplicity—these are eternal adornments upon the saint's character. The world sees such noble traits and great poets sing their praises. Among all scriptures, the stories of saints are the highest. They surpass all other narratives. Only those blessed by divine destiny are drawn to such tales. They alone relish these divine pastimes.

But the argumentative ones, who ever dwell in doubt, remain wrapped in the darkness of ignorance. For them, there is no time to savour this joy; they remain entangled in worldly pursuits. Therefore, O noble souls, do not fall into that state. Understand these words with their full meaning. Just as the ancient scriptures are heard with reverence, let these too be heard sweetly and sincerely. With your support and understanding, my heart is filled with devotion. Otherwise, I—just a foolish, insignificant poet—could not have composed anything with clarity or inspiration.

Thus concludes the sixteenth chapter of the sacred Bhakta Līlāmṛta, a nectar-filled text. Simply hearing it fulfils one's heart's deepest longing. O loving and faithful devotees, this sweet sixteenth chapter has been poured forth like ambrosia. Drink deeply of its rasa.

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Chapter 17

Śrī-pāṇḍuraṅgāya namaḥ (Salutations to Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga)

When the listeners are loving and attentive, the speaker's heart blossoms with delight, and his words flow forth unhindered, free from doubts or wavering thoughts, carrying the essence of the sacred tale. Just as the rising sun causes the lotuses upon a lake to open their tender petals, so too does the sight of devoted listeners make the heart overflow with love. It is like the peacock who dances joyfully at the sound of thunder, or like the infant who, beholding his mother, leaps into play, or like Gaṇapati who, standing before Lord Śiva, displays his art of dance, or Sarasvatī who, gazing upon her father Brahmā, bursts forth into song. In such a manner, standing in the holy presence of saints like yourselves, I speak with simplicity, answering in the pure tradition. Whether my words be perfect or flawed, that is known only to Śrī Rukmiṇī's Beloved.

At the close of the previous chapter, it was told that the Lord of Paṇḍharī, in the guise of a brāhmaṇa, had lovingly taken up residence with Eknātha, remaining there for twelve full years. At the end of that time, a brāhmaṇa arrived from Paṇḍharpur. Recognising him as the Lord of Rukmiṇī Himself, Eknātha beheld His auspicious form. Yet, to avoid public recognition that would disturb His work, the Lord, the bestower of liberation, vanished from sight that very moment.

Once, Uddhava, the faithful servant of the Sadguru, humbly prayed to the Lord that he might hear the Bhāgavata from His own lips. Seeing such heartfelt longing, the Lord commenced the narration of that great Purāṇa. Devout listeners gathered eagerly, leaving aside the entanglements of worldly life—simple men and women, labourers, merchants, householders of renown—all came with reverence to hear. Sitting close by according to custom, they listened with loving devotion; and as the meaning was explained with clarity, the knots of doubt were cut away.

At that time, the Lord—still in the guise of a brāhmaṇa—appeared suddenly before Eknātha. Bowing to Him with true devotion, Eknātha asked from where He had come and what was His name. To this, the Lord replied, "My name is Keśava. I live alone, free from all desire. Hearing of your noble fame, I came swiftly here, wishing to hear the Bhāgavata from your lips. If you grant me this, I shall remain with you always." Eknātha replied that such was his own wish as well, that they might dwell together constantly.

Inwardly, Eknātha wondered at the many guises in which this Vaikuṇṭha-pati delighted to appear, never revealing His full mystery. For twelve years He had dwelt in his house as a brāhmaṇa, and now He had come again as Keśava, unknown to any. Day by day, sitting in close companionship, they would listen to the Bhāgavata, the Lord Himself raising subtle questions when a verse allowed for interpretation, and Eknātha answering them with authority.

Uddhava and one other devotee sat foremost among the hearers, while many others gathered around. Those who came regularly to this satsanga were filled with Viṣṇu-bhakti; compassion, patience, peace, and detachment settled within them. By Eknātha's words, false dealings were abandoned, dharmic aspirations arose in the heart, and love for the Lord's Name deepened. As a sweet fragrance spreads from sandalwood even to the thorns of nearby trees, so the virtues of saintly company transformed even the ignorant into knowers of Truth.

It was as in Dvāpara-yuga, when Uddhava, most dear to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, would sit and listen to His līlās—such was the scene now. With love ever new, this bhakti grew stronger each day, drawing the hearts of listeners and dissolving the illusions of worldly life. In the third watch of the day, crowds filled the courtyard to hear, their love for the Lord swelling beyond measure.

Seeing Eknātha's state, the loving were gladdened, but the prideful brāhmaṇa scholars of the town conceived envy in their hearts. They sat idly together, criticising him openly: "He has set up shop in this holy place, gathering nañve devotees around him. His eloquence is not great, yet he has ensnared the minds of people through kīrtana. He has cast aside the many Purāṇas, speaking only on the Bhāgavata, and explaining it in the common tongue so clearly that all are drawn to him. By hearing it, people become desireless, giving up their votive rites for worldly gains, and sinking into his philosophy."

They grumbled further: "Our patrons once maintained their households through our services, but now they are captivated by Eknātha's discourses in the vernacular. Many read the Dnyāneśvarī daily, speak sweetly of devotion, and lose interest in our Vedic rituals. What will become of us if all are drawn to him? We are learned in all four Vedas, yet few seek our counsel now; they have gone over to this 'Vishnu-avatāra' as people call him."

Yet, even as these townsmen slandered, Eknātha's mind remained fixed in Brahman. Whether honoured or insulted, he saw all as the form of his Guru Janārdana. For him, praise and blame, pleasure and pain, were alike. Knowing that it is the same Lord who moves the world to both censure and adore, his heart rested in perfect equanimity, absorbed in the joy of the Self.

The brāhmaṇas of the holy town, filled with envy, sought to trouble Eknātha in various ways. They would come desiring whatever they saw in his possession, yet he never deceived them, but freely gave. If any brāhmaṇa, upon seeing a fine garment or vessel, asked for it, Eknātha would at once hand it over. When strangers came to the town seeking a benefactor, the townsfolk would direct them to Eknātha's residence, saying, "Here lives the generous donor."

Even when a thousand guests arrived, he would feed them all to their satisfaction, and, as if aided by divine siddhi, send them on their way without delay. These same brāhmaṇas, though possessing abundant wealth and grain in their own homes, never offered food to

others. Out of malice, they would point visitors towards Eknātha's house, refusing to help themselves.

One day, a great storm broke. Rain fell without ceasing for seven days and nights. The temples leaked, no dry ground could be found, and fuel was nowhere to be obtained. Though the brāhmaṇas had wealth and grain in plenty, they could not find even a handful of fuel to cook their food.

Late at night, four brāhmaṇas, tormented by hunger, went from house to house seeking a meal. The people of the town told them, "There is one noble-hearted man here—Eknātha—his house is over there." Directed thus, they went to his home and said, "We four have come, hungry, upon hearing your name. Kindly prepare food for us at once in your house."

Hearing their words, compassion arose in Eknātha's heart. He instructed Girijābāī to prepare the meal. She replied that there was no fuel at all. Eknātha then turned to Uddhava and said, "The temple itself is encased in wooden planks. Remove them at once." Uddhava hesitated, saying that this would cause great delay. At once, Eknātha untied his sacred turban, split the wooden mast with speed, and made fuel enough for the cooking.

Hot water was provided for the brāhmaṇas to bathe. Fires were lit to warm them. Girijābāī herself served the food with her own hands until the brāhmaṇas were satisfied, and they blessed Eknātha, saying, "By the grace of Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga, may your virtuous disposition ever remain."

In due time, the day came for performing the śrāddha of Eknātha's father. Brāhmaṇas were invited, and the cooking was done in his own house. At the appointed hour, he sent them for their ritual bath, and by the time the food was ready, they were delayed. That day, the three great deities—Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Maheśvara—came, disguised as mendicant fakīrs. Their beards were long, their eyes reddish, their bodies covered with skins, their heads crowned with matted locks, and in their hands they held rosaries.

They stood before Eknātha and said, "We three are hungry. Give us food to fill our bellies." Without a moment's hesitation, Eknātha replied, "Certainly." Food was already prepared, so he served them immediately. Seating them close by, he fed the fakīrs with his own hands, and after they had finished, offered them betel-leaf.

Perceiving his love for God in all beings, the three Lords revealed their divine forms to him, granting him their vision. "You have truly blessed us," they said, and, resuming their guise of fakīrs, departed.

Soon after, the brāhmaṇas returned from their bath, only to see the fakīrs leaving, contentedly belching. Speaking in their own tongue, the fakīrs blessed Eknātha, saying, "You

have fed us to our heart's content; may God bless you." Hearing this, the brāhmaṇas whispered among themselves, "A pollution of caste has occurred! On the day of his father's śrāddha, he has fed Muslims before feeding us!"

One among them said, "His father must have been a man of great merit, for at midday these fakīrs came in hunger. The śrāddha is finished for us now; we have nothing more to do here." And they all turned to leave.

Eknātha quickly came forward, bowed before them, and said, "They were hungry fakīrs, so I fed them at once. I shall prepare a second meal for you now; please forgive any offence and complete the śrāddha." Again and again he entreated them humbly, but they refused, saying, "You have committed corruption; we will not eat."

They went to the dharma-adhikārī of the place and reported, "Before performing the śrāddha, he fed fakīrs." The head of the brāhmaṇas came with many elders to Eknātha's house, declaring, "We have come to cast you out."

The brāhmaṇas said to him, "Today is the day for your father's śrāddha. Why then did you feed Muslims before us?" At this, Eknātha—ocean of peace that he was—felt not the slightest anger. Like the sea that absorbs the floods of many rivers without disturbance, he remained unmoved, having long since broken the pathways of lust and anger through incomparable discipline.

Bowing to the brāhmaṇas as forms of his Guru Janārdana, he said, "Please show your grace; let the śrāddha be performed now." The dharma-adhikārī replied, "You have great merit indeed. Now your forefathers will come from heaven themselves to partake in the meal."

Eknātha answered, "It will be wonderful indeed if your words do not prove false. Even the impossible can come to pass; there is no doubt in this." As he spoke, the rites of oblation began, and by that very act, the gods themselves, along with Indra, were satisfied.

Then, in a marvel to all, the Lord Mādhava appeared from within a stone deity, bearing the Śrīvatsa mark upon His chest, while the poorest of men looked on in wonder. The assembled elders said, "We need no more proof; your forefathers will surely come. Set out three seats upon the earth."

As Eknātha spoke, his forefathers descended from above—resplendent forms, radiant with spiritual light, wearing sacred threads across their chests and holding golden ritual vessels in their hands. Seated upon the prepared seats, they began to chant the Vedas. All the brāhmaṇas present gazed upon this astonishing sight in silent awe.

A wondrous act of the noble Nath came to pass, and the gathered Brahmins were overcome with shame. Bowing their heads low, they quietly withdrew from the assembly. The chief among them, the Dharma-adhikari, departed in silence along with the others who had joined him in the plot, while the remaining Brahmins—those who had attended in ritual purity—stayed on to witness what would follow.

The rite of śrāddha was duly completed; the formal resolve was pronounced, and the ancestors were served the sacred meal. Having partaken, they accepted the ritual offerings and honorarium, and then, in swift and radiant manner, departed along the heavenly path. The onlookers beheld this marvel with their very eyes, and their minds were filled with astonishment. Approaching the Dharma-adhikari, they recounted what had transpired: "In our sight, the ancestors, having dined, have ascended to the realms above." Hearing this, the Dharma-adhikari was stricken with deep embarrassment, lamenting that his very life now seemed vain.

They spoke among themselves: "We schemed much to deceive him, yet God Himself aided Eknath. Upon us has come the disgrace, and what reflection can now be made? Just as Durvāsa was pursued by the discus when he troubled King Ambarīṣa, so is today's affair at Rāhātī—our shame is as great." In such manner the Brahmins conversed. As for Eknath, neither elation nor grief arose in his heart; he bore no resentment for the many ways the Brahmins had sought to wrong him, nor could he contain his wonder at the divine sight of the forefathers descending to partake of the meal. In his mind was firmly established the certainty that all was filled with the presence of his Guru Janārdana, and in his ears, praise and censure were held alike.

At the third watch of the day there was always the recitation of the Purāṇas, and at night, the singing of God's praises. The devotees of Paithan were drawn to his house as bees to a fragrant blossom; by day and night his home was a place of pilgrimage. The Brahmins, seeing his spiritual wealth, burned inwardly with jealousy.

They said, "Hearing Eknath's kīrtan, the people of Paithan are captivated; all engage in the worship of Śrī Rāma and have become true Vaiṣṇavas. None now pursue ignoble conduct or false vows, and the livelihood of those who profit from vice is ruined. The people follow the path of the Bhāgavata." Just as thieves are troubled when moonlight illumines the earth, so were these envious ones pained by the spread of Nath's glory.

Yet they found a small cause for mischief: there was in that place a certain Brahmin named Kṛṣṇadāsa, a devotee of Bhavānī. With great austerity he worshipped the Goddess, who at length granted him direct vision. Asking a boon, he sought poetic skill, and with this gift he began a great work—the Yuddhakāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa—written in the Prakrit tongue, adorned with apt analogies and pleasing style, which won the admiration of the Brahmins.

They said among themselves: "Eknath, though a poet, often composes with ancient scriptural responses interwoven, and in his gatherings there are women, Śūdras, and many other devotees whose speech flows freely. But this Kṛṣṇadāsa has produced a Rāmāyaṇa of true literary beauty, and the Goddess herself is pleased with him. Without revision, each verse is perfect. Such a poet will not appear again in ages past or to come."

Thus praising Kṛṣṇadāsa before Nath, they sought to stir rivalry. Hearing their words, Eknath's heart was gladdened; he said within himself, "The infinite glories of the Lord can never be fully known." Though the Brahmins had begun this device with malice, there was no hatred left in their hearts after witnessing Nath's conduct, and they returned to their homes.

Meanwhile, Kṛṣṇadāsa continued his Rāmāyaṇa, yet before completing the Yuddhakāṇḍa the Goddess appeared to him and said, "Know for certain that at the third watch of the coming dawn, your body shall meet its end. Keep this in your mind." Awakening from this vision, Kṛṣṇadāsa was seized with great agitation, thinking, "My work is unfinished—what shall I do?"

Taking up the manuscript, he went to the house of Eknath. Nath came to the door, and seeing him, rose to receive him. With humility, Kṛṣṇadāsa placed his head at Nath's lotus feet, and was seated with honor. Then he recounted all from the beginning, saying, "O Nath, the Goddess has told me without doubt that I shall die at dawn. The Yuddhakāṇḍa of my Rāmāyaṇa, though nearly complete, has some portions remaining. You must finish it." Placing the manuscript before him, he urged Nath to take it up.

Nath read one chapter, and finding it excellent, said, "This work must be completed by your own hand, not mine." But Kṛṣṇadāsa, mindful of time's approach, replied, "Death is near, and the fear of it presses heavily upon me." Then Nath inquired, "How many days will it take you to finish?" Upon hearing his answer, Nath said, "Until then, Death himself will not touch you." Trusting Nath's word, Kṛṣṇadāsa resolved, "If I remain here and work day and night, the book will be brought to perfection."

But Nath advised, "Go to your own home; if the wind of death comes near, I shall come swiftly to you." Content with this, Kṛṣṇadāsa saluted him and departed. Nath told others of the pledge he had given, and on the very next day, at dawn, Kṛṣṇadāsa bathed and began his fixed daily devotions. As the appointed time drew near, his breath grew faint—when suddenly Nath arrived, assuring him, and, placing his hand upon his body, commanded Time itself: "From this moment, for eleven days, you shall not touch this man's body."

All present were astonished, but Death, honoring Nath's word, withdrew. Kṛṣṇadāsa, thus granted respite, sat to write the Rāmāyaṇa without delay. The news spread quickly, and many Brahmins said among themselves, "If Kṛṣṇadāsa dies on the eleventh day, the promise is true; otherwise, it is false."

On the tenth day, the Yuddhakāṇḍa was completed, the Brahmins were fed in offering, and Sarasvatī was worshipped with due honor, while Nath's greatness was proclaimed. On the eleventh day, Kṛṣṇadāsa, having bathed and performed his daily rites, knew his end was near. Nath came to him, garlanded him with flowers, and offered worship. Without the least pain, Kṛṣṇadāsa departed to the higher realms. The Brahmins then said, "We had spoken

much in praise of Loḷya, yet in the end, our design has turned to our own discredit. What reflection can be made now?"

It is the way of the Lord that when adversaries devise in their minds some harm against His devotees, that very scheme becomes the means by which the devotee's noble fame spreads throughout the world. For such is the wondrous, unfathomable working of the Master, that even actions born of envy are turned into occasions for divine glory. Thus, when some people began to speak among themselves, saying, "This man's birth and former state must have been high indeed, therefore God Himself aids him," they unknowingly magnified his repute beyond measure.

The simple-hearted and devout fall at the saints' feet in love, but to the envious, the saint's deeds appear distasteful. Yet such is the inscrutable play of the Lord's own power—Vaishnavi Yogamaya—that the truth remains hidden from those blinded by malice.

In the province of Karnataka there lived a wealthy householder and moneylender, known for his devotion to Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga. Upright in conduct, generous in nature, and esteemed by all, he bore deep yearning in his heart to worship the Lord in the form of a beautiful deity. With that longing, he had a murti of Viṭṭhala fashioned from metal, its countenance serene and smiling. Whenever he beheld that gracious form—the very giver of boons to Pundalik and beloved of Rukmini—his soul found perfect rest.

When the time came for the installation of life-breath into the deity, he made ready all the sacred requisites and sought an auspicious day and hour. One night, while sleeping, he beheld in a dream the Lord of the Universe, who spoke to him: "On the banks of the Godavari, in the holy kshetra of Pratishthana, there dwells a devotee named Eknath, the disciple of Guru Janardan, adorned with the virtues of devotion, knowledge, and renunciation. The murti you have caused to be made in form must be taken and offered to him at that place. Should you insist on establishing it here against this command, you will meet with many obstacles, and the grievous disease of worldly bondage will not be cured."

Awakening at once, the householder's mind was greatly stirred. Sleep would not return, and as soon as dawn broke he went to the learned Brahmins, saints, and holy men, narrating his vision. The omniscient elders advised him, "Hold your resolve for two more days. If this dream returns again, then indeed you must take the murti there without delay."

Thus it happened that for three consecutive nights the same vision came to him, making the command certain. Taking the deity of Pāṇḍuraṅga with him, he set out for Pratishthana. Reaching the Godavari's bank, he bathed with devotion, his body adorned with fine garments and ornaments, attended by horses, men, and companions. The Brahmins of the kshetra, seeing such splendour, were gladdened and said among themselves, "Surely this man is our destined patron." Asking his name and teacher, they were told, "In this place there dwells a

Vaishnava devotee named Eknath, the disciple of Guru Janardan. In a dream the Lord commanded me to bring this murti to him. Therefore I have come seeking his presence."

Hearing this, some murmured in disquiet: "Eknath has cast a spell upon the village, and now he deceives even strangers by sending them such dreams, so that they may bring him offerings and wealth." Yet, when the householder affirmed his earnest desire to meet the saint, he was directed towards Eknath's dwelling. Entering, he saw Śrīnāth (Eknath) seated upon a seat, with Uddhava before him. Bowing full-length in loving reverence, he was at once welcomed warmly by the saint.

On being asked whence he had come and for what cause, the householder recounted all—how he had the deity of Viṭṭhala made, how the Lord had thrice appeared in his dream commanding that it be brought here, and how by the merit stored over lifetimes he now found himself at the saint's feet. Placing the murti before him, he gazed upon that gentle and smiling countenance until his heart was filled with peace.

Eknath at once lifted the deity, holding it close to his heart, saying, "O Mover of the Universe, Giver of Liberation! How marvellous and mysterious are Thy ways!" Uddhava too, beholding the murti, was filled with joy. By the saint's command, preparations began swiftly. An astrologer was called to fix the propitious hour for the consecration, and Uddhava busied himself with all the arrangements.

The townspeople, witnessing this devotion of their beloved Śrīnāth, spoke in wonder: "From the far land of Karnataka has this deity of Viṭṭhala come!" On the appointed day, scripture was recited in the third watch, and in the night there was joyous kirtan of the Lord's names. Listening with all his heart, the householder felt deep satisfaction and declared, "By the power of his speech he has drawn all minds to God—this indeed is none other than Pāṇḍuraṅga Himself, incarnate for the upliftment of the world."

When all the preparations had been completed and an auspicious day and sacred hour dawned, only one watch of the night remained. In the meantime, a feast was prepared for the assembled company. The devout and graceful housewives, their hearts filled with reverence, used their own hands to cook a variety of dishes. Numerous delicacies of many kinds were lovingly made at that time.

As morning approached, the worship of the Deity was commenced. Learned Vedic priests arrived, guiding the ritual according to scriptural injunctions. The sacred deity was bathed with pancāmṛta, while mantras of consecration were intoned. Thereafter, the Lord was adorned with resplendent garments of brocade, decked with pearls, precious stones, and rubies. Many flowers, fragrant blooms, and fresh tulasī leaves were offered in loving worship to the Lord of the universe.

Incense, lamps, and the pancārati were offered, while auspicious musical instruments resounded at the temple entrance. The Vaiṣṇavas roared with the sound of the divine Name, and the maṅgala-ārati was performed. With ghee preparations and sweetmeats as offerings,

the naivedya was presented in pure love, accompanied by Vedic mantras and a handful of flowers.

Then, Eknātha, taking a lump of fresh butter in the hollow of his palm, touched it to the lips of the sacred deity, saying: "O Viṭṭhala, now partake of this. In Your incarnation as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, You often stole and ate butter in abundance. Let my eyes behold that very sight today, as You come to us hungry in this very moment. If You reveal such a wondrous marvel here, the glory of this place will greatly increase." Hearing these words, the deity of the Lord at once smiled, and quickly extending His tongue, tasted the butter from the saint's hand. Witnessing this divine play with their own eyes, the assembled devotees raised loud cries of "Victory to the Lord!"

With deep love, Eknātha circumambulated the shrine and offered a full prostration. By the time two watches of the day had passed, the rows for feeding the brāhmaṇas were arranged. The Lord Himself, in His subtle form, washed their feet and offered sandal paste and other respectful articles, waving incense and lamps before them. Then many varieties of sweets were served equally to all. Concluding with the resolve that Janārdana is the enjoyer within all beings, the offering was completed.

In this way, the resident brāhmaṇas were fully satisfied, receiving betel leaves, gifts, and dakṣiṇā. The householder who had witnessed the festival felt a great inner joy. He resolved to bring Śrī Nātha to his own home and arrange, without delay, the wedding of Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga with Śrī Rukmiṇī.

Approaching the saint with folded hands, he prayed: "Master, we shall now return to our native place and have a beautiful deity of Rukmiṇī fashioned. Then, with Your whole family, You must come to celebrate the wedding of the Lord." Hearing this earnest plea, Eknātha agreed, also consulting with Uddhava, who likewise assented. The householder offered abundant wealth, took leave with permission, and departed.

Without delay, the deity of Śrī Rukmiṇī was prepared in the temple, and all the necessary arrangements for the wedding were completed. A letter, decorated with red kumkuma, was sent with a fine pāiṭhaṇī silk, inviting the Master to come promptly with the bridegroom, the wedding party, and the Lord's deity. Meanwhile, preparations had already been made in advance, and special invitations were extended even to the poor, the lame, and the blind, requesting them to join the auspicious event. They were gifted new garments and respectfully brought along.

The wedding procession set out with great rejoicing. In a palanquin was seated the bridegroom, the deity of Lord Viṭṭhala; Girijābāī rode in a chariot; horsemen rode ahead, their splendor praised by all. Villagers exclaimed: "Behold! A son is born to the devotee of God. Now he becomes the bridegroom and goes afar for his wedding!"

Thus, at his own will, Eknātha led the procession, with people along the way coming out to have darśana, amazed at the wondrous glory. The wedding party halted outside the host's

village, whereupon the host came forth to greet them, accompanied by all the townsfolk. With heads bowed in love at Śrī Nātha's feet, they received the guests. Uddhava and the villagers mingled freely with the wedding party, adorning the bridegroom with fine garments and ornaments, delighting the Lord thereby.

Honouring the priests with cloth, they worshipped Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga's deity and led Him to the wedding pavilion. The devakā rituals, the installation of auspicious symbols, the brāhmaṇa feasts, and the wedding of Viṭṭhala and Rukmiṇī were all conducted with care. The brāhmaṇas held the wedding curtain while chanting attentively; at the cry of "Oṁ Puṇyāha," auspicious instruments resounded, and the devotees roared with victory-cries. The day became one of great festivity.

The honour of the bride's side was borne entirely by Girijābāī. The host bowed at the saint's feet, praying: "Now let us hear from Your own lips the divine kīrtana." Eknātha assented, since all arrangements were complete. As the cymbals, vīṇā, and mṛdaṅga resounded, the atmosphere became saturated with the music of the divine name. In kīrtana, the nectar of love overflowed, captivating the hearts of all listeners. With affectionate remembrance of the Lord's saguna līlā, the saint kept alive the thread of devotion, from time to time engaging the assembly in the chanting of the divine names.

Thus, for a full month, he remained there, inspiring all to the devotion of Viṣṇu. Then, with the host's permission, the saint prepared to return to his own land. The host, filled with satisfaction, gave abundant gifts to the bridegroom, distributed garments among the wedding party, and bore all expenses generously.

In this way, after completing the sacred narrative, Śrī Nātha returned to the town of Pratiṣṭhāna. The residents of that holy place, beholding him, bowed at his feet with deep reverence. When night came, the Lord of Rukmiṇī was taken in procession, and there, among the assembly of servants and kings, the saint's virtues and glories were praised.

Thus ends the seventeenth chapter of the Śrī Bhakta-Līlāmṛta, sweet to the devout who drink its nectar, and fulfilling the cherished desires of those who hear it with love.

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Chapter 18

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ.

Śrī-Rāma-kṛṣṇāya namaḥ "Salutations to Śrī Rāma-Kṛṣṇa."

In order to attain the Supreme, the Lord chose to dwell humbly, unconcerned with worldly grandeur. That very Supreme Brahman, manifest before the eyes upon the brick at Pandharpur, robs the beholder of bodily awareness the moment they behold Him. Blessed indeed are those who dwell in that sacred land of Pandhari, remaining there out of pure love. They behold with devotion the manifest form of the Supreme, endowed with attributes, as if seeing Him face to face.

To behold the Chandrabhaga River is to receive the merit of all holy pilgrimages at once. By her touch, great sins are dissolved without residue, just as the ancient scriptures have proclaimed. Those whose hearts cherish the supreme longing to visit Pandharpur, and who speak of such a pilgrimage with sincerity, are freed forever from the cycle of birth and death, and attain union with the Lord Himself. Fortunate are the steadfast Vaishnavas who undertake the sacred journey to Pandhari, for there at the threshold of Pundalik they behold the very Lord of Vaikuntha.

The glory of Pandharpur is matched by that of the holy town of Pratishthan, where, out of pure devotion to His servant, the Lord of Rukmini once appeared in fullness. In the previous chapter, a beautiful tale was told of how certain Brahmins attempted to test Eknath. On that occasion, his ancestors themselves descended from heaven to witness the event, and the story was recounted in detail. In another wondrous incident, the very form of Panduranga journeyed from Karnataka, celebrated a marriage ceremony there in loving grace, and then returned to His own abode.

With supreme joy, the townsfolk brought the Lord of Pandhari in procession. On an auspicious day and time, the Lord of the universe was seated upon the throne. The Brahmins of that region were all invited, and were served a sumptuous feast of many delicacies.

It was then that Shri Nath (Eknath) confided privately to Uddhava: “Though I have been without the opportunity to serve, the Lord of Panduranga has come to my home. In all my life until now, I have never journeyed to Pandharpur; no service at His temple has been performed by me. Yet, like a cloud pouring rain upon the parched chataka bird without its cry, or the moon rising to delight the vigilant chakora without summons, or a mother tending her child at play without call, so has the Lord of Rukmini, unbidden, graced my home, coming from distant Karnataka.”

These words awakened in his heart a longing to behold Pandharpur with his own eyes. “For it is indeed the very Vaikuntha upon earth—the true maternal home of the saints,” he

thought. Speaking thus, Shri Nath received Uddhava's prostrations, and it was decided that this would be their first pilgrimage. A most auspicious day was chosen.

With banners gleaming in gold, cymbals, veenas, and sweetly resonant mridangas, Shri Nath set out, accompanied by the warkaris. By the arrangement of holy company, even the residents of the sacred field joined in, their hearts filled with supreme joy, raising the Name in exultant chorus. Singing and dancing, the Vaishnavas advanced, clapping to the cries of victory, their joy resounding in the air.

In this manner, chanting and singing, Shri Nath walked on foot. At the city's edge, many came to see him off. At that moment, he instructed Uddhava: "You must tend to the responsibilities at home." Uddhava, accepting this command, bowed at his feet, and Shri Nath departed.

Just as Shri Nath had arranged, so too did Uddhava continue the daily recitation of the Purana and the nightly kirtans. Worship of Panduranga and the feeding of guests were maintained without the least neglect. The townsfolk rejoiced, feeling nothing wanting.

Meanwhile, the great company of pilgrims journeyed toward Pandharpur with Eknath. At every halt along the way, kirtan was performed. No one felt deprived of the Lord's presence, for all were immersed in remembrance of Hari. The weak and helpless were cared for lovingly, and moment by moment the Lord of Rukmini was sung of in intimate devotion.

For the upliftment of the world, Shri Nath—the dear servant of Lord Panduranga—never abandoned even the smallest observance meant for the welfare of people. As the saints conduct themselves, so do the faithful follow, and thus they are sanctified, freed from the bondage of worldly existence. To behold a steadfast Vaishnava was to bow in reverence, for such devotees bore no trace of pride. Like the sun that illumines the world without vanity in its heart, so were these servants of the Lord.

Walking in love, kirtan rang continually along the way. As they neared Pandharpur and beheld the temple's spire, their hearts leapt with bliss, and they forgot all bodily concerns.

That very night, Pandharinath appeared in the dream of the temple priest, saying: "A devotee named Eknath, the disciple of Guru Janardana, is on pilgrimage and will arrive at dawn. Go forth with the flag-bearing dindis to meet him, and on the fourteenth day, have him perform kirtan at the main gate." The vision spread quickly through the whole sacred town.

Saints, ascetics, and heroic Vaishnavas gathered in joy, raising the kirtan's roar; the heavens themselves seemed to echo. Shri Nath, upon beholding Pandharpur, prostrated fully to the earth. Tears of bliss streamed from his eyes as he and the Lord met. "Blessed is this day," they said, "for we have beheld Pandharpur—Vaikuntha itself upon earth, the saints' own home."

After praising the glory of that place, they offered the ceremonial ovation to Purushottama. The entire party, together, went down to the Bhima river, where they were met by the saints

and holy men. “Blessed indeed is this day,” they said, “for we have seen our Lord.” Bathing in the Chandrabhaga, they fulfilled their daily vows.

Then Shri Nath went to take darshan of Pundalik, foremost among the Lord’s devotees, who abides forever in samadhi. With love, he worshipped him. The priests then said, “Now let us proceed to the main gate of the Lord Panduranga’s shrine. First, meet the Lord of Rukmini, and then rest in joy.” Trusting the Brahmins’ word completely, the disciple of Guru Janardana, Eknath, led the kirtan with all the flags and banners into the temple. They prostrated at Garuda’s feet, while saints and devotees sang, offering reverence to the Lord’s lotus feet.

Pandharpur is indeed Vishnumay—Vaikuntha itself upon the earth—where all, men and women alike, are without division or discord. Though there are countless other tirthas in the world, in those places pride often finds room. But Pandharpur, the Mother, at the very sight banishes faults and destroys the root of ego. Even the hearts of the wicked are softened, and she turns the mind toward the supreme aim.

The root of birth and death is none other than this wicked ego; he who swiftly overcomes it is verily to be known as a master among yogis. The yogi fixes his gaze upon the tip of his nose, yet this Lord appears to stand upon the very bank of the Bhīma, His hands resting upon His waist. Yogis renounce their sense of “I-ness” and thereby attain the topmost position, but the consort of Rukmiṇī does not act merely for His own liberation — He uplifts all beings bound in matter.

Such was the Lord of lords, the giver of the bliss of liberation, whom Eknāth beheld with his own eyes. His heart was filled with supreme delight, and he approached Him with loving devotion. The Lord’s stance was graceful and tender; both hands adorned His waist; His divine face shone with beauty; His ears were decorated with makara-shaped earrings. A yellow silken garment of celestial sheen clothed Him, and a garland of tulasī blossoms graced His neck. Standing upon the brick, He revealed such a captivating form that, upon beholding Him, all bodily awareness faded away.

With a heart overflowing with love, Eknāth placed his head at the Lord’s lotus feet, offering praise and hymns with his lips, worshipping the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha. The transcendental form which his eyes beheld, he treasured within the abode of his heart. Then came Satya-bhāmā and Rukmiṇī; he bowed to them also. As he circumambulated the holy place, he sang of Pāṇḍuraṅga, and when he returned to his lodging, his inner being was immersed in the joy of devotion.

On the next day, he invited all the brāhmaṇas of the sacred town, prepared a meal with sweet delicacies, and served them with honour, thus completing his vow. On the day of Caturdaśī, in the presence of Rukmiṇī’s Lord, he received the divine command to perform kīrtan for all the saints, a service which delighted his heart beyond measure.

When the temple priests perceived this divine sanction, they addressed Eknāth respectfully: “O Eknāth, you should now perform kīrtan upon the Garuḍa platform, for the Lord Himself

has granted you this honour." Recognising this as the Lord's will, the devotees prepared with great enthusiasm. A high platform was set with due dignity; banners of seven hues fluttered; all the instruments — cymbals, vīṇās, mṛdaṅgas — were assembled. Saints, ascetics, sages, Vedic scholars, and residents of the sacred place gathered with joy to listen, for the fame of Eknāth's discourse had already reached their ears, and their eagerness to hear him was great.

From far and near came the Vārkarī devotees in large numbers, brave and tender-hearted Vaiṣṇavas, along with countless pilgrims, men and women alike, until the place was thronged. Eknāth rose and, as is proper, began with an auspicious invocation, bowing to the Lord, addressing the listeners as embodiments of his Guru Śrī Janārdana Swami Himself. Having thus spoken, he struck the cymbals in the name of Viṭṭhala, and with the great tumult of kīrtan the air resounded in a unique and wondrous melody.

He chanted: "O Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu, Hari, Govinda, Achyuta, Ananta, source of bliss, Supreme Person, Sat–Cit–Ānanda, O Mukunda, teacher of the worlds; O Keśava, Nārāyaṇa, Mādhava, friend of devotees, ocean of compassion, Lord of the gopīs, Lord of lords — You remove entirely the delusion of worldly existence. For the sake of the ignorant and deluded, You have stood upon the bank of the Bhīma; granting audience to Your faithful devotees, You protect them with the glance of Your mercy."

Thus, singing the holy names with love, he danced in the midst of the kīrtan, and the listeners, forgetting their bodies altogether, were carried away in a marvellous tide of divine joy. In that blessed moment, someone among them asked: "O Master, your ancestor was the saint Bhānudāsa. Tell us his life-story, for it is most delightful to hear."

Hearing this request from the assembly, Śrīnāth was inwardly pleased. "Indeed," he said, "this was already in my mind, and the Lord Himself has given me leave to speak of it." Then he began: "In the city of Vidyānagara there reigned King Rāmarāja (King Krishna Devaraja), surrounded by his household and court. One day, with all royal pomp, he journeyed to the sacred place of Paṇḍharpur. Beholding the beautiful form of Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga, his heart was deeply drawn. He thought: 'I must bring this Rukmiṇī's Lord to my own city of Vidyānagara (Vijayanagara).' With this notion in his mind, he remained there in fasting for seven days.

In a dream the Lord Hṛṣīkeśa appeared to him, saying: 'It is because of the special devotion of Puṇḍalīka that I have made My dwelling here in Paṇḍharpur. I have given My word to him that I will remain to meet My faithful devotees. Nowhere else is My heart so at rest as here; even the Milk Ocean and Vaikuṇṭha themselves seem lacking compared to this place. Here My loving devotees come for pilgrimage at all times, and in their company I, the dark-blue Lord, dwell happily, free from all longing. Yet, O King Rāmarāja, you have conceived the desire to take Me to Vidyānagara; I will tell you the means. Purify yourself, remain in the sacred state, and have a brāhmaṇa carry Me in his arms without setting Me down upon the ground along the way — then I will come to that place.'

When the King awoke from this dream at night, his heart was filled with joy. In private he consulted his minister: 'What means should we adopt to accomplish this?' The minister replied: 'We must invite learned brāhmaṇas from our own land, offer them rich gifts, and bring them to the path. Let them carry the Lord swiftly to the city.' The King agreed, and letters of request were sent respectfully to the brāhmaṇas of each village. These noble twice-born, honouring the cause as divine service, came to the appointed places, where water, food, and comfort were arranged for them.

Then the King bowed before the Lord and prayed: 'Now, O Pāṇḍuraṅga, show Your mercy to me; come swiftly.' And thus, with the brāhmaṇas carrying the Deity in their arms, the King proceeded, while the temple priests were filled with restless anxiety, for their Lord was in the grasp of the monarch."

The sovereign of the realm was a mighty ruler, unshaken by the strength of any other. Yet as he bore the sacred deity in his hands, men and women gazed upon the sight, their eyes brimming with tears. The moment the deity was lifted, Pandharpur itself seemed to vanish, as a body bereft of its life-breath.

Meanwhile, King Ramraya, with great reverence, carried the deity of the Lord in his very hands. His heart overflowing with delight, he made his way toward the city. Gathering around him the valiant Vaishnav devotees, he led the way with kirtan, while the flags of the pilgrim parties fluttered high and auspicious trumpets resounded. After performing worship and abhisheka with deep devotion, he placed the deity of Panduranga upon a throne and held a grand festival, his heart so filled with joy that he knew no rest.

With costly garments and ornaments he honored the Vaishnava devotees. Wealth and gifts were generously distributed among the Brahmins, making them content and blessed. The Queen Rukmini too was adorned with priceless jewels, silken garments, and pearl garlands, until the king's heart swelled with happiness.

That night, as the king lay in slumber within the temple, the Lord Panduranga appeared to him in a dream and spoke: "Since you have brought Me here to this place, hear now what I say. Govern your kingdom with justice and righteousness, ever upholding dharma. If you commit injustice, even in the least measure, I shall not remain here. Those loving devotees who are dear to Me—should you wrong them though they be innocent—I will return to Pandharpur, to My own dwelling."

Thus did the Lord of Pandhari reveal Himself to the king that night, filling him with a constant and reverent fear. At dawn, the priests came and performed their worship, while the king, having bathed, attended the puja and the waving of the lamps. Because the Lord was adorned with ornaments beyond price, there was great fear of thieves. For this reason the temple doors remained locked at all hours save the time of evening worship. None but the king might behold the Lord; this was the manner in which He was kept secure.

Daily, the king offered worship with the full sixteen forms of ceremonial honor, presenting thrice each day ghee-cooked delicacies. Lamps fed with camphor burned unceasingly, and flowers scented with musk, along with many other offerings, were laid before the Lord. Yet in His heart, Panduranga felt no joy, pierced by the arrow of separation from Pandharpur. "I have been brought here as if imprisoned," He thought. "When shall I be freed from this place?"

In the month of Ashadha, the great pilgrimage to Pandharpur was at hand. Saints, sages, and holy men pondered this in their hearts. The fearless, steadfast Vaishnava pilgrims came as they always did, but the worldly-minded said, "The Lord of Pandhari has gone far away." Thinking thus, they stayed home. The saints, however, celebrated the festival in Pandharpur as before. It was as when clouds pour rain upon the earth, and the streams swell only if the channels are open; in times of drought they run dry.

True devotees are like precious jewels tested on the anvil: gold that shines brighter when purified in the furnace, unlike brass which darkens; or like the touchstone-tested coin, whose gold remains untainted by fire. So too, when the storms of suffering strike, the steadfast in faith do not waver. Even in calamity, they hold firm to love, guiding their lives by the rule of devotion. Such a devotee is dear to the Supreme Person, as the soul is to the body.

Thus the saints spoke in parables, and the poet likened them to gold among base metals. When Ramraya had taken the Lord of Pandhari to his city, the devotees were stricken. Without Rukmini's Lord upon the throne, Pandharpur seemed lifeless—like a body without breath, an army without its king, or the night without the moon. Without Him, the city's life of worship faltered, and all were in anxious thought, yet no remedy appeared.

At that time, the great saints—Nivritti, Jnanadev, Sopan, Namdev, and the virtuous Muktabai—came together for the pilgrimage. With them were Kabir, Rohidas, Gorakumbhar, Gonabai, Janabai, and Namdev's close companion Bhaktaraj. They gathered upon Garud Par, where Namdev led the kirtan, until Bhanudas arrived in haste.

Bhanudas carried the veena upon his shoulder, singing many songs, his heart fixed upon Rukmini's Lord, his lips ever chanting the divine Name. In this state he reached Garud Par and joyfully greeted the assembled saints. Learning from them that the Lord had been taken to Vidyanagar by King Ramraya, the devotees spoke together in sorrow. "Behold the king's will," they said, "that even the Lord of Pandharpur has departed. And we, though rich in devotion, can do nothing to bring back Kesava."

Some spoke of the Advaitic truth: "The Lord is within our very selves, pervading all creation, leaving no place empty of His presence." Others feared the king's wrath should they attempt to retrieve the deity—lest they be cast into prison. "This is not for us to attempt," they said in disquiet.

Then Bhanudas, bowing to the saints with full prostration, spoke: "If you give me leave, I shall without delay bring back the Lord of Pandhari. You need only lay aside all anxiety, and

remain here in perfect faith." Saying this, he set forth, as Hanuman once went forth to vindicate Sita's purity, his heart alight with zeal.

Meditating upon Panduranga and singing His praises day and night, Bhanudas knew no rest but in love. His mind rejoiced in the thought, "I shall bring the Lord back with honor." So absorbed was he that hunger and thirst were forgotten, and only when someone offered food unasked did he partake, moving ever forward.

In this way he journeyed toward Vidyanagar, inquiring of all he met if they knew where the Lord had been taken. Fear of the king kept most silent, until one noble Brahmin, meeting him on the way, told him the whole matter: "King Ramraya brought Panduranga here and placed Him in the temple. But no one may see Him, for the doors are locked at all times."

Hearing this, Bhanudas thought to himself: "I must find a moment alone." And he resolved that as soon as the evening worship was concluded, he would go swiftly to that place.

That night, at the appointed hour, the king himself came to the sanctum. Hastily completing the śejarati ritual, he returned to his own quarters. The temple priests had gone outside, and, overcome with weariness, they too had fallen into deep slumber. At that moment, the valiant devotee Bhānudāsa appeared before the main entrance.

The sacred shrine was well-fortified, its four entrances each secured with sturdy locks. Yet, by the will of Rukmiṇī's Lord, the bolts were loosed in an instant, the barriers falling away as if by divine command. Every door swung open freely, and Bhānudāsa's heart was filled with a bliss beyond measure. "My cherished desire is fulfilled at this very moment," he thought, and at once stepped reverently into the inner sanctum.

There, before him, stood the Supreme Lord of the worlds upon His eternal brick, feet joined together, hands resting on His waist, and gaze fixed upon the tip of His nose. One glimpse of that beauteous face made Bhānudāsa's heart overflow with joy. Yet, outwardly assuming a mood of loving reproach, he began to speak to the Lord in a tone of complaint.

"O Rukmiṇī's Lord, O Master of Paṇḍharpur! You have bound Your own feet in opposition to the welfare of Your devotees. This is no action befitting Your divine compassion. You granted a boon to Puṇḍalīka, that You would ever remain here in his presence—yet do You not remember even an atom of the vow to deliver the bound and the fallen?

In the royal temple, You sit in solitude, enjoying rich garments and splendid ornaments, feasting upon delicacies offered daily. Thus have You remained in the pleasure-house of the gods, and in so doing, have forgotten us entirely."

Having spoken thus, Bhānudāsa, with the fervor of inspiration, composed an abhanga then and there, offering it to the Lord:

"On the banks of the Chandrabhāgā, standing upon the brick,

Vitthala rules as King of Paṇḍharpur.

All the powers of prosperity and accomplishment serve Him;
Even Brahmā and the others find no moment to approach.

Leaving His subtle essence here,
Who has stirred Him to act in the tongue of the Kanarese?
The conch, the kettledrum, and the mṛdaṅga resound,
The royal palace of the Lord is filled with their music.

Fragrant sandalpaste adorns Him,
Bee swarms hover over the flowers adorning His form.
Celestial maidens—Rambhā, Tilottamā, Urvaśī, Menikā—
Come in attendance, with many others.

Golden trays bear jeweled lamps,
And the lovely face of the Lord is waved upon.
But Mother Rukmiṇī stands sorrowful,
Wondering why Puṇḍalīka has fallen silent.

The hearts of all devotees and saints are wounded;
Without You, all is hushed.
Blessed is Paṇḍharpur, the mother's home of the universe,
Blessed too the sandy bank of the Bhīma river.

Bhānudāsa says: Come, walk with us—
Fulfil the debt of Your word, O Lord."

Having thus spoken in plaintive love, Bhānudāsa fell at the Lord's feet and implored, "O Lord, tell me—who has stirred You thus at this very hour?" Hearing this tender plea, the wielder

of the discus was moved to deep emotion. He embraced Bhānudāsa, pressing him to His heart.

Then spoke the Master of Paṇḍharpur: “I have been confined here as if in bondage, and you too, in hardness of heart, were prepared to depart without Me. Do not leave Me now, My beloved devotee. Without you, even for a moment, My throat cannot bear the weight of separation.”

Thus speaking, the embodiment of compassion placed around Bhānudāsa’s neck a garland of tulasī and flowers, as a token of His grace. “Go swiftly at dawn,” He said, “and take Me with you.” With the flower garland came a necklace of nine precious gems, placed there without Bhānudāsa’s knowledge.

As he left, the Lord of the worlds gently secured the doors behind him. When dawn broke, the king returned. But when the morning kakada ārati was performed, the royal necklace was nowhere to be seen. Suspecting theft, the king angrily accused the priests and ordered a search.

Messengers ran in all directions to find the culprit, and soon discovered the valiant Bhānudāsa seated on the bank of the Godavari, having bathed and now absorbed in remembrance of Viṭṭhala. The divine necklace glittered upon his neck, witnessed by all.

Seized and brought before the king, he was accused: “Here is the thief—see, he wears the necklace!” The king’s mind, clouded by delusion, knew not the truth and in anger commanded, “Since he is a robber, impale him at once!”

Without reflection, the order was carried out: Bhānudāsa was made to bear the stake upon his shoulder, his forehead smeared with vermilion as was the custom for one condemned.

Yet within, Bhānudāsa’s heart remained serene, absorbed in the Lord’s form. He thought, “O Lord of Rukmiṇī, this is indeed a most excellent device You have employed. You wished to accompany me, and for that reason placed this garland upon my neck. Now You even wish to place me upon the stake—yet in You there is not the slightest trace of illusion! Whatever death comes to this body, let it come as You will—but I shall never abandon the remembrance of You.”

“When the heavens thunder as though the very sphere of Brahman had split, and when the submarine fire rises to devour the three worlds, even then, O Vithoba, I wait for Thee. When the seven oceans blend into one, when the earth itself is drawn into dissolution, when the five elements merge back into primal stillness, Thou, my eternal companion, remain with me, O Vithoba. Whatever calamity may befall, I, Bhānudas, shall not waver from Thy holy Name; as the faithful wife cleaves to her lord, so shall I cleave to Thee, O Beloved of Rukmini. With such firm resolve, my throat choked with emotion, I journeyed until I came into the presence of the Lord of Pandharpur.”

Listen, O devoted ones, to the wonder that followed. In the very place where once a stake had been driven, tender branches had sprung forth in profusion, adorned with flowers and fruit, so that all who beheld it marvelled. The servants hastened to tell the king that the dry stake had become a flourishing tree. Hearing this, the prince was astonished and, filled with curiosity, set out swiftly to witness the marvel for himself.

At that time Bhānudas, with closed eyes, was absorbed in remembrance of the Lord of Pandharpur. Seeing him thus, the king bowed to the ground and said humbly, "O fearless hero of the Vaishnavas, I am but an ignorant fool, unknowing of such greatness." Opening his eyes, Bhānudas beheld the stake transformed into a mighty tree and exclaimed, "The Beloved of Rukmini has blessed me! Such a wonder is beyond mortal thought."

The king, taking Bhānudas by the hand, led him towards the temple. There they beheld the deity of Panduranga with a face saddened, tears flowing from His eyes. The king, moved to the core, again bowed full length and, with folded hands, spoke gently: "I am guilty of many offences. I tormented Thy devotee without cause. Forgive me, O Lord of Pandharpur, as Rama forgives the faults of His servants."

The Lord replied with compassion: "Now remember My form within your heart and dwell happily in your own city. I go with Bhānudas to Pandharpur. If you press to accompany us, misfortune will befall here." Hearing these words from the Bearer of the Śārṅga bow, the king remained quietly in his place.

Bhānudas then said to the Beloved of Rukmini, "What course can we now take? I have no royal authority to escort Thee with pomp, yet I long to bring Thee." Smiling, the Lord, in His grace, reduced His form to a smaller size, to the wonder of the king. With joy in his heart, Bhānudas lifted the Lord upon his shoulder, crying "Victory to Śrī Vithoba!" and carried Him away.

Screened from the world within the palanquin, the Lord spoke softly to His servant: "Today the universe is filled with supreme bliss, for the saints shall meet Me." Thus they hastened along the path until they reached Pandharpur. At Padma Tirtha the Vaishnava devotees alighted to bathe, while Bhānudas washed his garments and set them to dry by the bank. In that moment, the Lord, adorned with the forest garland, revealed His majesty — the upper part of the body crowned, the feet encircled with anklets — filling Bhānudas with awe.

Then the Beloved of Rukmini said, "Saints and elders await by Garuḍa's column. Go swiftly and tell them to come and meet Me." Bhānudas, with a cheerful face, went at once and announced, "I have brought the Lord of Padma Tirtha." Hearing this, joy overflowed in every heart. Taking up the palanquin, the company advanced with banners and festal music, the devotees singing kīrtan, dancing in love, and the townsfolk, great and small, joining the procession. All said, "How can we ever repay Bhānudas, the fearless Vaishnava, who has brought Śārṅgadhara Himself?"

Soon the entire assembly reached Padma Tirtha and, beholding the form of Panduranga, bowed to the ground with love. Bhānudas, with folded hands, placed the Lord in the palanquin, and the air resounded with cries of victory as devotees showered flower-dust from their hands. Thus was the Beloved of Rukmini borne in splendour to the river Chandrabhaga, bathed with due rites, and brought swiftly to the temple. On that auspicious and divinely appointed day, the deity was established upon the royal seat, and the Lord, the Giver of liberation, spoke to Bhānudas: "I can never repay your service. You have shown Me Pandharpur with your own eyes. Surely, in full truth, I shall take birth in your lineage."

As these words of world-redemption fell from His lips, the devotees roared with "Jaya! Jaya!" and the men and women of the holy place were filled with great joy, as though rain had fallen after a long drought, as though life had returned to the body. They celebrated with offerings to all, sharing sweet sugar in every household, while the Vaishnavas gathered by Garuḍa's pillar, their garlands swaying as they sang kīrtan.

Thus Bhānudas sang the sacred tale, and all the saints listened in stillness. When the life-story of their forebear had been sung, the sound of nādabrahma arose like a swelling ocean. The auspicious ārati was offered, the Beloved of Rukmini was honoured, and the king, servant of the servants, distributed sweet offerings to all.

Blessed indeed is the nectar of the Bhakta-Līlāmṛta, which fulfils the heart's longing by the very act of hearing. Sweet is this eighteenth chapter, steeped in the rasa of devotion, to be cherished by all loving devotees.

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Chapter 19

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Lord Śrī Gaṇeśa, the remover of obstacles)

All glory to the Infinite One who reclines upon the cosmic serpent, the ocean of compassion, the bee delighting in the heart-lotus of His devotees. Thou who pervadest the entire universe, ocean of virtues, Supreme beyond the supreme, Redeemer of the worlds! It is Thou alone who, in Thy boundless kindness, causest the life-stories of Thy devotees to be spoken; I am not an independent speaker in this matter, for I remain entirely dependent upon Thee, O Lotus-eyed Lord.

Even as the wind causes the blades of grass to sway, so too is the stir of thought in my mind awakened only by Thy power, O Pāṇḍuraṅga. Ignorant men, not knowing the secret of the sound of the drum, make all manner of comments upon its rhythm, but fail to recognize the drummer himself. Likewise, though my words may seem in parts imperfect or incomplete, the true cause and fullness rest wholly in Thee.

Where a tree has struck root, from there it never departs; even so, from the beginning until the end, Thou alone, O Śārṅgadhara, art our unfailing support. In truth, Thou art at once the hearer and the speaker, and besides Thee there is no place of refuge. Therefore, O Lord, turn Thy gracious gaze upon me, and ferry me across the ocean of worldly existence through the wealth of devotion.

In the preceding chapter, the wondrous tale was told of Eknātha's journey to Paṇḍharī, wherein he, in the sweetness of kīrtana, sang with heartfelt love the marvellous life of Bhānudāsa. Hearing this, saints, holy ascetics, and pious souls rejoiced greatly, saying among themselves, "Blessed indeed is this holy kṣetra of Pratiṣṭhāna, for in it the glorious Lord Śrīnātha grants His vision." Many proclaimed that Eknātha was no mere mortal, but verily the great devotee of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga.

Hearing words of self-praise repeated in his presence, Eknātha at once arose from his place and, moved by his inner longing, went to the temple to behold Pāṇḍuraṅga. Offering respects to the Lord and worshipping Him with loving devotion, he then prepared to take leave. Yet the special glory of Paṇḍharpur never left his heart, remaining in his remembrance night and day. He would recount its sacred renown to the people, until at length he returned again to Pratiṣṭhāna.

As he neared the town, the news of his coming reached Uddhava, his dear disciple. The inhabitants of the holy place, filled with joy, came running to welcome him. With minds absorbed in the vision of Pāṇḍuraṅga's form, they bowed to Śrīnātha with deep reverence. Embracing him with love, they found their joy too great to contain. Flags and banners were raised; the whole company proceeded in the manner of a festive procession, with Eknātha

leading in kīrtana. Along the way, decorated pavilions and carpeted paths had been prepared, and people gathered in wonder to greet him.

Amid such joyous clamour, Eknātha entered the temple. The lamps of the maṅgala-ārati shone brightly as he worshipped the Lord, the beloved of Rukmiṇī. Thus, at that time, the pilgrimage to Paṇḍharī was brought to a happy conclusion. Uddhava, the affectionate devotee of his Sadguru, remained seated beside him in loving service. In that place, the worship of Viṣṇu, the listening to the Purāṇas, the distribution of food to all, and the ceaseless chanting of the Lord's Name went on without interruption, nothing ever diminishing their flow.

Now in that same Pratiṣṭhāna there dwelt a venerable ascetic named Śrīpāda. Having conquered the six inner enemies of desire, anger, greed, delusion, pride, and envy, he had swiftly attained the state of a paramahaṃsa. In his vision, God was present equally in all beings; to him no difference appeared between rich and poor, great and humble. Whether it was a tiny insect or a mighty elephant, a lowly outcaste or a learned brāhmaṇa, he beheld all alike and bowed before every living creature with the same reverence.

The brāhmaṇas of the town would say to each other, "See, though Śrīpāda is so eminent, he shows no pride whatsoever; he offers obeisance to all." Whether it was an outcaste, a brāhmaṇa, a cow, a cat, a dog, a pig, or even the birds, he saluted them all with pure-hearted devotion. No distinction of caste or rank ever arose in his mind. His mantra had borne fruit, and he wandered freely, unattached to all. Some would remark that he concerned himself with none but himself, seeking nothing from others. Such a paramahaṃsa, they said, had no need to enquire into a person's caste or position.

Thus, among the townsfolk, some praised him and some spoke lightly of him; yet he remained untouched by either praise or blame, established in the state beyond bodily identification. Still, he had fixed one firm resolve in his heart—that he must have the darśana of Eknātha, and, with mind concentrated, must listen to his kīrtana with true love. Wherever he went, he bowed to all beings and took the vision of Śrīnātha, ever keeping his mind filled with joy and contentment.

So the days passed in this manner until one day an extraordinary event occurred. The Swāmī was going to the riverbank to bathe, bowing to all along the way. There, by the side of the Gaṅgā, a strange sight met his eyes—a donkey had been swept away in the flood and had perished. The body, carried downstream, had been flung upon the sandy bank by the receding waters, bloated and lifeless.

As the Daṇḍavat Swāmī came to that spot, he bowed in reverence even before the lifeless body of the donkey. Seeing this, the assembled brāhmaṇas began to laugh among themselves, wondering whether consciousness resided there at all. "O Swāmī," they said, "you are an embodiment of all-knowingness — before whom is this salutation offered?"

Hearing these words, the ascetic turned his gaze upon the scene. Indeed, it was a dead donkey, its body greatly swollen.

The brāhmaṇas then spoke mockingly, “If you can raise this donkey to life, then truly we will accept your devotion as genuine. For you claim to regard all beings in the world as your very own Self, and therefore you bow to them equally. If, then, you can restore life to this donkey, our faith in you will be complete.”

Hearing these words, the paramahaṃsa replied gently, “The indwelling Self pervades all creatures.” Standing there, he prayed earnestly: “O Lord of Lords, O Master of Paṇḍharī, if Thou hast forsaken this body, then what is the meaning of my bow? It now appears as the mere corpse of a donkey — was my prostration in vain?”

Even as he uttered these words, an extraordinary event took place. Before all eyes, the dead donkey was restored to life. In a moment it shook its ears and nose, snorted, and stood up, as if nothing had happened. The brāhmaṇas were struck with amazement. “This is indeed a rare and wondrous sight,” they murmured among themselves. Their pride dissolved; they bowed to the Swāmī with reverence.

A great crowd gathered to behold the marvel, filling the whole sandy bank. Men and women alike were filled with wonder at the great perfection of this humble bowing saint. They said, “Such a noble and blessed soul is rarely seen upon the earth.” Yet among themselves, the brāhmaṇas began to whisper, “Even in our own town is there not Eknātha, who sings kīrtana daily and has the entire populace in his sway? But this — to raise the dead — is beyond his power. He teaches the pious day after day, yet his knowledge is dry and without such miracles.”

Thus they spoke in disparagement, and while they were still conversing, Śrīnātha himself came down to the riverbank, intending to perform the Brahma-yajna. Seeing the brāhmaṇas there, he heard their crooked words, how they praised the bowing saint as ‘blessed, blessed’ for his miracle, yet belittled others without such outward signs. “Without wonders,” they said, “there is no true saintliness; to be called a holy man without such acts is meaningless, and to walk among people without proving oneself in this way is shameful.”

After speaking thus, the brāhmaṇas returned to their homes. Then the Daṇḍavat Swāmī came to that place and prostrated himself fully before Śrīnātha. Beholding the ascetic, Eknātha returned his salutation with pure-hearted respect and said, “Today, you have greatly increased the honour of your name. But know this — in this Kali age, inauspicious and filled with doubt and hatred, even over and above these troubles there reigns a Yavana king, bringing obstacles to spiritual practice.

“When word of your miraculous power reaches his ears, he will keep you confined in prison. If a member of his household dies, he will command you to restore life instantly. Likewise, worldly men everywhere will importune you, asking about past and future, demanding displays of power. This will disturb the steadiness of your state. Consider this well.”

Hearing the nectar of these words from Śrīnātha's lips, the bowing saint accepted them as truth. Then, making a humble request, he said, "O Master, grant me liberation at once." Śrīnātha replied, "It is well; take samādhi now." At once he called for a workman to bring clay, and the cool wet earth was placed in the ascetic's hands.

Seating himself firmly in meditation, the saint entered the disembodied state. After performing the proper worship, the clay was placed over him, sealing his resting place. Śrīnātha then bathed and returned to his own home.

The news that the Daṇḍavat Swāmī had taken samādhi spread throughout the kṣetra. All the brāhmaṇas gathered together and began to speak among themselves. Learned paṇḍitas and guardians of the Vedic law sent word to summon Eknātha to Pimpaleśvarī. They said, "Without informing us, you have acted in a most unusual way. You gave food to the saint by the Godavari and buried him alive — what mantra did you utter there? This was an act done entirely against the proper ordinances. To insist upon a living samādhi is to kill a sannyāsī — and now that you have done this, you are guilty of murder and must be excommunicated. Where is it written in the scriptures that one may forcibly bury a renunciate alive? Show us the text that grants such authority."

They added, "That donkey which he raised so easily — such power was too much for you to bear. That is why you put him to death this very day. We know this inner secret well." Some said, "He is bold indeed, and deeply versed in the ways of bhāgavata dharma, yet he opposes the path of auspicious works and overturns the established conclusions of our sacred law."

Some among the brāhmaṇas muttered scornfully, "He must surely know some bewitching mantra — he merely sings the dry Name, deceives the pious, and leaves them stripped of discernment." Another, more insolent, spoke openly, "Indeed, he has strayed from the path of righteous action, breaking away from the injunctions of the Vedas and indulging in a most irregular course, opposed to sacred works."

They accused him further: "He has slain a sannyāsī, yet his mind shows no disturbance; he continues his worship in joy, as if his heart were of stone. Without performing any act himself, he preaches knowledge to others. No compassion arose in him — he slew the ascetic and cast him aside. O Eknātha, the guilt of this killing rests upon your head. If you would clear yourself, then show us a miracle, and by that remove your excommunication."

They went on, "Here, before us, is the very stone deity of Nandi — let it consume this bundle of dry fodder at your hands. If this happens, there will be no fault in you, and the charge will be erased."

Hearing the words of the brāhmaṇas, Eknātha humbly bowed and placed his head at their feet, saying, "From the mouth of my Master no false deed could ever proceed. By the grace of Sage Vasiṣṭha, I have been tested like gold in the furnace of the sun — I could never, by false speech, deceive even the least of men."

But the brāhmaṇas retorted, “You speak cleverly enough; show us the miracle, and then we will accept your answer as truth.” Without delay, they brought forward a bundle of dry stalks and placed it before him. Seeing their insistence, Eknātha turned to Nandi and spoke: “We, by our own will, placed the ascetic in samādhi; there was no fault in this. Yet to remove their doubt, consume this fodder at once.”

The words had scarcely left his lips when a great marvel occurred — the stone Nandi at once protruded its tongue, seized the bundle, and ate the dry fodder eagerly before the eyes of all. The assembled brāhmaṇas stood astonished, their hearts filled with wonder. They said, “We had cast you out, but from this day you are free of that sentence, for you have shown us this miracle.”

Hearing their words, Eknātha bowed in full prostration, saying, “I am indeed foolish and without deep understanding of the Vedas and śāstras. By serving the holy dust of my Master’s feet, I have become pure; all vows and disciplines reach their perfection in the sanctity of his feet.”

The brāhmaṇas themselves declared, “This was no act of mere practice — this was the Lord’s own play shown through Eknātha, a marvellous festival of devotion. By service to his Guru, by loving worship of Śrī Hari, he has won the supreme grace of Pāṇḍuraṅga, who guards him at every moment.”

Thus speaking among themselves, the brāhmaṇas departed to their homes. Throughout the kṣetra the news spread, and people marvelled greatly. The faithful and loving proclaimed, “The Lord of Vaikuṇṭha Himself has incarnated to redeem the world.” But the doubters and the envious muttered, “This answer is false.”

Certain brāhmaṇas of the kṣetra who had remained behind went swiftly to Pimpaleśvar. Looking upon Nandi, they saw it was again as before — a stone deity. They said, “How could this one have eaten the fodder? To our eyes, nothing of the kind has happened.”

They summoned Eknātha and said, “Your excommunication still stands. The miracle you showed yesterday — none of us here witnessed it. Now, while you are before us, we place this bundle of fodder before Nandi. Let him eat it before our eyes, or else we shall take the matter to formal dispute, with śāstra as our ground. If it is proved that you truly buried a living sannyāsī, then the curse will be fixed upon you without release.”

Hearing these words, Eknātha felt a moment’s burden in his heart. Then he prayed to Nandi: “If you eat the fodder only once, these people will remain doubtful, for others in the town have yet to come. They too will speak the same words to me. Therefore let every person’s doubt be removed entirely — devise at once a means to accomplish this.”

As these words left Eknātha’s lips, another great wonder took place. Before the eyes of all, the stone Nandi rose from its place, moved swiftly, and leapt into the waters of the Godavari — where it remains to this day.

In former times, beholding such wondrous marvels, even the gods upon earth would be struck with astonishment. They would say, “This glory is beyond comprehension; such deeds cannot belong to an ordinary human life.” They would recall that in days past, our venerable forefathers had beheld the great Jnāneśvar himself, who, while yet a child, took a young bull in hand and, with perfect clarity, recited the entire sacred lore of the Vedas. They would remember how, when the perfected sage Changadeva came to meet him, he caused an unmoving wall to proceed forward, bearing him aloft. And now, in this age, Eknāth has accomplished a work equally marvellous.

Thus speaking among themselves, they turned to Eknāth with affection and said, “There is now no cause to keep you away. Go without delay to your own abode.” They praised him, saying, “Blessed is the love in your heart, which has brought life to the very stone deity of Nandi. The Lord of lords himself has been gracious to you; we have understood well the divine intention towards you.” Hearing such words of praise, Śrīnāth, in all humility, bowed at their feet and said, “This is not my own strength, but the fruit of your grace. I am surrendered unto you all.”

Thus did the saint Janārdan speak, and the assembled brāhmaṇas were gladdened. Meanwhile, the people of Paithan, young and old alike, came eagerly to behold the living Nandi. Even to this day, that Nandi remains at that place, as visible proof to all. Whoever goes there may see it plainly, and should harbour no doubt in the heart.

When Śrīnāth returned home, the hearts of the faithful overflowed with joy, and day by day his noble fame spread ever further.

In due course, there came a time when Śrīnāth set forth for the city of Alankāpuri, leaving his worthy disciple Uddhava in charge of the household. With his companions and followers, he began his pilgrimage, the company progressing joyously along the road, the air resounding with kīrtan and the sweet chanting of divine names.

Reaching Āḷandī, he alighted on the bank of the Indrayani River. That night, in a dream, the saint Jnāneśvar himself appeared and spoke to him: “The roots of the ajān-vṛkṣa have spread deep, even to the level of my throat. Plant a young sapling there, and at once uncover my samādhi.” Śrīnāth awoke and acted just as instructed. Beholding the divine form of Jnāneśvar, he offered full prostration, and carefully planted the sapling aside, then reverently resealed the samādhi. At that very place, he held joyous kīrtan; and upon the day of Ekādaśī, the entire pilgrimage celebrated the Lord through night-long worship.

In Alankāpuri, however, there was a great scarcity, and the pilgrims could find no provisions. Then, listen well, O faithful—how the Lord of Pandharpur displayed his marvel. The compassionate husband of Rukmiṇī took the guise of a lowly Lingāyat, and, carrying provisions upon his shoulders, sat by the wayside awaiting them. When the pilgrims approached, he said, “Take all this, and let your journey continue in joy. I ask for no payment.

O Eknāth, know that I have brought this for you." So saying, the Lord in disguise measured out all the needed supplies—grain, flour, rice, clarified butter, vegetables, and salt. For four days this continued, until, just as suddenly, the mysterious benefactor vanished from sight, leaving no trace.

When the pilgrims noticed his absence, they spoke of it to Eknāth, saying, "The one who brought us such aid is nowhere to be seen." Smiling inwardly, the saint said, "What is this, but the work of the Lord who bears Garuḍa upon his flag, the unfailing guardian of his devotee's honour?"

Thus the pilgrimage concluded, and they made their way homewards. Nearing the sacred precinct of Pratiṣṭhāna, Uddhava came forth to meet them. Men and women of that holy place thronged to greet Śrīnāth with love, bowing before him with reverence. The procession moved onward, garuḍa-standards and flags held high, the air ringing with the singing of Jnāneśvar's glory. Cymbals clashed, mṛdaṅgas resounded, and the very principle of nāda-brahma seemed to fill the sky. Devotees danced in joy, praising the blessed day.

Upon reaching home, they performed the evening ārati to Śrīhari with devotion. The next day was given to feeding the brāhmaṇas sumptuously with many delicacies, honouring them with betel and offerings until all were content. Thereafter, Śrīnāth himself spoke of the greatness of Alankāpuri.

One day, seated in bliss, he began with deep love to examine the sacred text of the Jnāneśvarī. Through careful reading, he perceived that, owing to the scribes' errors, some verses had lost their proper sense, and the work, as known among the people, was not wholly as the saint himself had intended. Indeed, it was for this very purpose that Śrī Jnāneśvar had once taken birth at Pratiṣṭhāna, and now, in the form of Eknāth, sought to restore the text in full.

With gracious glance upon Uddhava, Śrīnāth spoke of Jnāneśvar's profound vision, how he had rendered the Bhagavad Gītā into the pure Marathi language. "By the grace of Guru Janārdan," he said, "this text has now been restored. Let the faithful gather and perform its recitation with devotion." Uddhava heard these words with great delight, while Keśava, in the form of the Lord of Rukmiṇī, became the foremost listener.

Day after day, seated face to face, Śrīnāth would read from the Jnāneśvarī, and other devotees, men and women alike, would hasten to hear. The deep meaning of the text became plain upon his lips, understood by all, young and old, and leaving no room for doubt. Each afternoon, the reading would continue, with Keśava and Uddhava as eager hearers, the atmosphere vibrant with joy. When the work was completed, they worshipped the goddess Sarasvatī, performed a bright maṅgalārati, and distributed sweet offerings.

In the form of Keśava, the Lord remained there for twelve years, enjoying the saint's company. At length, his heart grew inclined to depart, and he sought Eknāth's permission. "Through the happiness of your company," he said, "twelve years have passed here. Now my mind turns away; grant me your leave." Eknāth replied, "O life of the worlds, promise that you will again grant us your vision whenever you so wish." Upon hearing this, the form of Keśava vanished instantly, leaving Eknāth silently praying that the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha might return to this very place in future.

Thus did the Lord of Dvārakā depart, and Uddhava, his constant companion, remained ever by the saint's side. In the joy of kīrtan, Eknāth would sing with steady rhythm, keeping perfect time with cymbals in hand, and a marvellous atmosphere would arise. Men and women of every age gathered daily to hear the sacred songs. In that holy place lived a certain great devotee—once a valiant Vaiṣṇava in a former birth, but through some fault now born into a lowly family. His wife was a chaste and faithful soul, devoted to the deity of Śrī Viṣṇu. Together, they engaged in the remembrance of the divine Name, with love as their constant path.

One night, as Śrīnāth was holding kīrtan, the husband and wife came and sat outside. Listening with one-pointed attention, they forgot all bodily awareness, absorbed entirely in the bliss of hearing.

When the sacred Hari-kīrtana had concluded, the gathered devotees began to return to their respective dwellings. Many, before departing, came with reverence to bow before Śrī Eknātha, and then went home carrying the bliss of the evening in their hearts.

Eknātha's daily service to the Lord was of a fixed and unwavering pattern, performed with deep devotion. Each day he would go to the banks of the holy Godavari to bathe, but as he walked, he would sweep and cleanse the path itself — for him, no action was too small to be rendered as service unto the Lord. When Śrīnātha came for his bath, Eknātha would invariably take darśana at that very moment. From a respectful distance he would offer a full prostration, worshipping Śrīnātha in his heart as the very embodiment of Lord Viṣṇu Himself.

One day, on an auspicious Hari's day, Eknātha was joyfully performing kīrtana, singing the divine sports of the Lord. His theme was the revelation of the universal form (Viśvarūpa) to Arjuna, as granted by Lord Śrīkṛṣṇa Himself. Immersed in that contemplation, the saint sang with loving fervour the very same verses that Śrī Jnāneśvara had once rendered with such beauty.

On that occasion, the noble queen of the Mahār ruler, present in the assembly, addressed Śrīnātha directly with a question from her own lips: "When Śrī Hari assumed the all-encompassing Viśvarūpa, pervading every particle of the universe, where was I then — low-born and unworthy as I am — and in what place might I have been?"

Śrīnātha, beholding her sincerity, spoke words sweet as nectar: "In that very moment, you were related to Lord Kṛṣṇa, who pervaded everywhere and in everything." Hearing this

utterance from the saint's own mouth, her mind became still, absorbed in divine contemplation. All notions of difference or separation vanished; the duality of imagination faded like the last glimmer of twilight.

Now, whatever she beheld in the world of moving and unmoving things, she saw only as one with the Lord. To speak of differences seemed meaningless to her heart. She was firmly convinced that Eknātha was none other than the dear devotee of Supreme Lord. Therefore, she resolved to put aside the distractions of palace life, and, with her lord the Mahār, went to dwell at Kāśāṇa.

The couple would come to the holy Lakṣmī-tīrtha for their daily bath. In this way, they could receive Śrīnātha's darśana without effort. Yet, to be nearer still, they chose to abandon that bathing-place and take up residence by the banks of the Godavari, where Eknātha daily performed his service.

One day, the queen, wife of the Mahār, cherished a thought in her heart. She said to her husband: "Eknātha is dear devotee of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga, come for the upliftment of the world. Yet I have a longing within: to invite Him to our home for a meal. If you go to Him, making the request in His service, I shall prepare the offerings with all care."

The Mahār, hearing her heartfelt words, went at once to a quiet spot where he found Śrīnātha and disclosed the secret longing of his queen — to feed the Lord in saintly form at their own home. He added humbly: "If you grant your permission at this very moment, I shall make ready the provisions."

Perceiving the sincerity of the request, Śrīnātha bore no trace of disdain. Instead, he said gently, "By the grace of my Guru Janārdana, your desire shall be fulfilled." Comforted by these fearless words, the Mahār returned to his queen with the glad tidings.

The royal household was simple in means, weighed down by many hardships of worldly life, yet they carefully gathered the provisions: pure water at the tulasī-plant in their courtyard, clean clothes and vessels set aside for the sacred occasion, daily bathing performed with devotion, and constant remembrance of the Lord's name. They collected flour, lentils, rice, ghee, and tender leaves for the meal.

On every Hari's day, they refrained from their own meals, instead going to hear Eknātha's kīrtana. All four watches of the day passed in the wakeful remembrance of the Lord; through the flow of kīrtana, time itself seemed dissolved.

When dawn arrived, the queen, ever devoted and chaste, said to her husband: "The time has come to extend our invitation to the Master. I will complete the cooking at home, but you must go swiftly and wait for Him by the Godavari's bank. When He comes for His bath, approach Him at an opportune moment, speak with deep humility, and bring Him our message."

The Mahār obeyed at once. He went to the Godavari and seated himself, awaiting the saint's arrival. Soon Śrīnātha came, and the Mahār bowed before Him with loving reverence. Seeing his sincerity, the saint sat for a moment in natural ease. Then the Mahār spoke from the depths of his heart: "Master, I have but one request. I feel unworthy by birth, and so there is some hesitation in me — yet I beg You, please come to our home and accept our meal."

Śrīnātha replied, "You are a loving Vaiṣṇava devotee. Seeing the purity of your intent, Lord Kṛṣṇanātha is pleased. A learned brāhmaṇa well-versed in the Vedas, yet devoid of bhakti for Śrī Hari, may be adorned with twelve kinds of merit — yet an outcaste who is devoted to the Lord is far superior to him."

Thus Eknātha spoke the very verse which the great Bhāgavatas have declared in praise of pure devotion, showing that the Lord values the heart's love above all worldly distinctions.

Once, Śrī Eknātha recited a verse from the scriptures which declared that even if a man be surrounded by a thousand faults, yet if he turns away from them and bows to the lotus-feet of Lord Nārāyaṇa, he is far greater than the most learned brāhmaṇa who, though proud of birth and mastery of the Vedas, remains averse to the worship of the Lord.

It so happened that a brāhmaṇa was present when Eknātha spoke these words to an untouchable devotee. Anger arose in the brāhmaṇa's heart, and soon word spread among the other brāhmaṇas. In a body they came before Eknātha, surrounding him with loud reproaches, for they were agitated that such exalted spiritual instruction had been given to one of low birth.

"Eknātha!" they said, "this is not the Bhāgavata you are quoting, but merely the Vedas. How could you explain such a verse to an untouchable? Do you not know that the knowledge of the highest truth is forbidden to such people? This is as futile as feeding a dog from a golden plate, anointing a donkey with sandal paste, or showing a mirror to the blind. By giving this knowledge to an unfit recipient, you have committed a grave fault, and you must at once perform the proper expiation."

Hearing their words, Śrī Eknātha folded his hands, bowed to them with reverence, and replied with gentle humility: "This man you call untouchable is, in truth, a Vaiṣṇava devotee named Rāṇyā Mahār. His heart is absorbed in the worship of Śrī Hari. He has conquered the six enemies — lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride, and envy. The signs of the untouchable you speak of are not seen in his person. Indeed, all the virtues described in the Bhāgavata dwell within him. By devotion, he has brought even the Supreme Brahman under his sway. Seeing his anguish and devotion, I spoke a few words of truth to him. If in this I have committed a fault, then I beg you, forgive me, O venerable ones."

But the brāhmaṇas were unmoved. "You are obstinate," they said. "By instructing one who has no right, you have corrupted the path of dharma. If you do not perform penance for this offence, we shall excommunicate you."

Eknātha, ever the embodiment of the Supreme in human form, did not argue further. Respecting their words, he consented to undergo the penance. The brāhmaṇas then took him to the waters of the Gaṅgā, where he stood as they instructed. They brought cow-dung and sacred ash, chanting mantras as they prepared for the ritual.

Meanwhile, the untouchable devotee himself, Rāṇyā, had heard of the incident. Without a word, he returned home. There, as he was preparing the meal, his wife noticed his troubled mind and asked the cause. He told her, “Eknātha spoke to me today, and because of this, the brāhmaṇas have become angry. They have taken him to the Godavari to impose penance upon him.”

Hearing this, his wife’s heart was shaken. “Ah,” she said with tears welling up, “when shall such a treasure from a past birth — the service of a saint — ever again fall to our lot? Rather than live with the weight of such guilt, I should give up my life at once!” And saying so, she cast her body to the ground, weeping so profusely that the earth was wet with her tears.

Her husband, moved by her grief, consoled her: “Do not despair. Eknātha is an ocean of mercy; he will not reject the plea of the humble. I shall go to him once and invite him to our home. If he refuses, then we may indeed lay down our lives.”

With this resolve, he hastened to the Godavari, where Eknātha was still in the brāhmaṇas’ presence, and prostrated fully before him. “Master,” he said, “please honour my home with your presence today and partake of food there.”

Eknātha, who was the very personification of compassion and divine play, understood the depth of his devotion. In front of all the brāhmaṇas he said, “When the cooking is complete, I shall surely come at midday.” Hearing this, Rāṇyā was filled with joy and returned home to prepare for the saint’s arrival.

The brāhmaṇas, however, murmured among themselves: “By agreeing to dine at an untouchable’s home, Eknātha has brought ruin upon us all. This will lead to the confusion of caste and destruction of order.” They recalled that they had already imposed penance upon him for merely speaking with the man — and now he was to eat in his house!

They conferred privately: “Let us watch closely. At the proper moment, we shall catch him in the act and prove his guilt before all.” Thus, they divided themselves, some sitting near the Gaṅgā, some near the road, others at the saint’s doorway. They busied themselves in murmured talk, yet all the while kept Eknātha in their sight, determined to confront him when the time came.

Some of the brāhmaṇas, holding their rosaries, sat upon the banks of the Gaṅgā chanting their mantras. Others, having gone to the house of the untouchable devotee, hid themselves near the doorway. Laying aside all their usual household duties, they had turned their attention wholly to this matter, yet none among them perceived in their hearts that the one they sought to censure was in truth a dear servant of Lord Viṣṇu.

They whispered among themselves, “Let us not give Eknātha any hint of our watch. When the untouchable comes to invite him, and he goes to eat there, then we shall catch him in the act.”

Meanwhile, at the temple, Eknātha completed the worship of the Lord. Returning home, he began his customary Purāṇa recitation. When the midday hour came, Uddhava — a pious brāhmaṇa guest — was present, and Eknātha welcomed him with reverence, offering him holy water, sandal paste, and other marks of honour before serving him food.

At the house of the untouchable devotee, the cooking was now complete. His wife instructed him: “Go quickly and bring the Master here.” This steadfast Vaiṣṇava, though born in humble circumstances, had purified his dwelling like a temple. He had swept and smeared the floor, drawn auspicious designs in coloured powders, and prepared all the articles for worship — sandal paste, rice, flowers, and garlands — his heart brimming with joy as he waited eagerly.

At last, he came to Eknātha’s door and humbly prayed, “Master, please come now to partake of the meal.” Eknātha replied gently, “You go ahead, I shall follow shortly.” This brief exchange was caught by the watching brāhmaṇas, who signalled to one another with knowing glances.

But in that very moment, Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga Himself, assuming the exact form of Eknātha, appeared at the untouchable’s house. The devotee’s wife, seeing “Eknātha” arrive, was overjoyed, bowed before him with pure devotion, and seated him with the honour due to a saint. It felt to her as if she were offering nectar to the very source of life itself. She washed his feet lovingly, pressed her folded hands to her eyes, anointed his brow with sandal paste, placed a tulasī garland around his neck, and drew a fine tilaka upon his forehead.

Some brāhmaṇas, hidden nearby, witnessed all this with their own eyes. Others, stationed at a distance, came running to report that somehow “Eknātha” had slipped past without their notice. “He must have changed his dress and deceived us like a thief,” said some. Others insisted, “No — he has cast a spell upon our eyes!” For had they not kept watch from morning, blocking every path?

Meanwhile, certain brāhmaṇas in the untouchable quarter of the town went to Eknātha’s own home — and there indeed they saw him seated, rosary in hand, with Uddhava beside him. Astonished, they sent word to their companions. “It is impossible,” they said, “for he appears to be here and there at the same time!”

A group hurried back to the untouchable’s house and found “Eknātha” seated upon a wooden seat, receiving the offerings of sandal paste, flowers, and all the rites of welcome, exactly as before. Thus the brāhmaṇas saw with their own eyes that Eknātha’s form was present in two places at once, like an image and its reflection, without the slightest difference. Between Pāṇḍuraṅga and Eknātha, there was no duality at all. Just as two drops of sacred water, though named separately, are one in essence; just as the light of the sun and its

reflection are indistinguishable; just as the blue of the sky and the sweetness within a flower are each part of a single reality — so were Eknātha and the Lord one in form and spirit.

They marvelled: "How can he be in both places at once?" For they watched until the third quarter of the day and found no fault, no break in either presence. At the untouchable's home, after the worship was complete, the saint was served the meal with loving devotion. His wife offered many varieties of food, believing him to be the true eater, the Eknātha Himself. And the Lord, hungry for the love of His devotee, partook with great delight, accepting whatever was offered with heartfelt joy.

When the meal was over, He washed His hands, took the betel leaf from her own hand, and was well pleased. The husband and wife circumambulated Him and offered full prostrations. With tears of gratitude they said, "O Master, today You have fulfilled the longing of our hearts. We are without devotion, without wisdom, without the merits of birth or ashrama — yet You have sanctified our home and made our worldly life blessed."

Assuring them of His grace, the Lord in Eknātha's form then vanished from their sight. The remnants left upon His plate were joyfully taken as prasāda by all the men and women of the household.

The brāhmaṇas, filled with wonder, went to bathe in the Godavari, then hastened to Eknātha's house. There they saw him seated with Uddhava, having just completed his meal. Bewildered, they said among themselves, "We cannot fathom the end of this man's powers. We have shadowed him all day, yet he has been in two places at once."

Some, unwilling to admit the truth, muttered in their hearts, "He must have learned some strange incantations from the Śabaras and made the spirits serve him, showing us a wonder of illusion." But their words rang hollow, for what they had witnessed was beyond all human artifice — it was the Lord's own play.

Thus ended this wondrous episode, the glory of the saint shining forth like a beacon. Kings themselves, upon hearing such deeds, proclaimed the fame of the saints with royal praise. Indeed, the mere hearing of this chapter from the Bhakta Līlāmṛta fulfils the heart's yearning, for it is steeped in sweetness and love for the devotees of the Lord.

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Chapter 20

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ.

All glory to Śrī Hari, the Lord who reclines upon the infinite serpent! I stand as a humble supplicant at Thy door, O Pāṇḍuraṅga, with a cherished yearning held deep within my heart, which I now lay before Thee. My sole desire is to dwell always in the blessed company of Thy true devotees, O beloved of Rukmiṇī; and if such be my heart's aspiration, O Śrīpati, why shouldst Thou not fulfill it? If I may but accompany the pilgrims who journey to sacred Paṇḍharī, I would gladly become even as a beast of burden in their homes, carrying their food bundle upon my back, so that they might take me with them to Thy holy door. When I enter that sanctified field of Paṇḍharpur, I shall not be cast aside like a useless stone, but shall fall at the lotus feet of the saints and gain their purifying touch. Even if Thou shouldst cast me again into human birth, I beg Thee to make me simple and guileless, so that without hindrance I may ever remember Thy lotus feet in the very core of my life. I crave not the pride of learning, nor the honor of worldly esteem; only grant me, O Lord of Paṇḍharī, an unshakable sense of belonging to Thee alone. The life-stories of those undivided devotees who are most dear to Thee delight my heart, O Garuḍa-bannered Lord; awaken in me such remembrance that I may grasp their meaning within.

In the preceding chapter, we spoke of the gentle-hearted devotion of the nameless woman in whose home the Lord lovingly partook of a meal—though to the learned brāhmaṇas this remained unknown. Eknātha, the dear devotee of Supreme Lord, displayed such varied lilās, yet some brāhmaṇas, harboring malice in their hearts, slandered her, saying she had learned the forbidden Sabarī mantra. But by a wondrous act of grace, Eknātha revealed two distinct forms of the same person at once, confounding all their schemes so that they could find no ground to stand upon.

In due course, he (Eknātha) came to the city of Pratiṣṭhāna. There dwelt a devout householder of noble heart, who observed daily his baths, prayers, and righteous duties. By the force of his past karma, he had once come into possession of a Touch stone. Content with this, his mind was at peace, and he enjoyed all the blessings of worldly prosperity. No other man in this world seemed to possess such perfect harmony of wealth and comfort. The members of his household lived in mutual care and courtesy, each understanding the other with thoughtful consideration.

Yet, as the days passed, sorrow entered his life: his wife and son both departed from this world, leaving his heart bereft and restless. In this world it is often seen that where there is no food, there is a multitude of children; or that when a vow is made with effort, the newborn is soon afflicted with illness. One man may be blessed with a beautiful wife, yet himself be of low character; another may be noble, but lose his wife in youth. Some may have wife,

son, and wealth, yet suffer a cruel and wasting disease. The generous man may lack wealth to give; while the wealthy man may be miserly beyond measure. One may possess a fine and healthy body, yet have but a short span of life; even a righteous king may see his days cut short. A man may yearn to give in charity, yet fail to find a worthy recipient. Such are the strange ways of destiny, known to all through experience.

Thus, though this householder had, through fate, acquired the Touch stone, still his family departed, and sorrow weighed heavily upon his mind. Seeing the fickle nature of worldly life, his heart grew detached, and he resolved to undertake a sacred pilgrimage. But he pondered anxiously where he might safely keep the precious stone. Not finding any person he could fully trust, he came at last to the home of Eknātha. Choosing a moment of solitude, he approached and offered his obeisance with sincere devotion. He spoke: "O Master, I am setting out upon a great pilgrimage, having resolved this in my heart. I possess a priceless gem, yet I know not who could safeguard it during my absence. In you I behold a faithful saint, steadfast in tapas and trustworthy beyond all others."

Hearing these words, Śrī Nātha replied, "Wherever your faith rests, there alone you should deposit it without hesitation." Thus assured, the householder, in full confidence, placed the Touch stone into the saint's hand. When Eknātha beheld it, he thought, "This is but an ordinary-looking stone, and yet it is said to be a priceless treasure. What virtue lies hidden within it?" So he inquired further. The householder, taking a piece of iron in his hand, touched it to the stone, and instantly it turned to gold. "See," he said, "this is indeed the philosopher's stone. When I return from my pilgrimage, you shall give it back to me. In truth, O Garuḍa-bannered Lord's devotee, this will cause you no trouble."

Without the least attachment, Eknātha placed the stone beneath the seat upon which he sat. Offering his respectful salutations, the householder departed swiftly upon his pilgrimage. To Eknātha, the keeping of such a treasure was no matter at all, just as the ocean has no special regard for the rain that falls upon it, or the radiant sun needs no lamp for light, or the one who has tasted nectar cares not for any herb. To such a realised soul, gold is no different from clay. Thus, the philosopher's stone, though precious to others, remained without place in his memory.

A full year passed, and the householder returned from his pilgrimage. First, he went to pay homage to Śrī Nātha, meeting him with deep affection. They spoke of the pilgrimage and all its happenings. Yet in his mind, the householder thought, "He will not hand over the treasure without being reminded; I will return later to receive it."

So, after some time in quiet conversation, he departed, thinking to come again on the morrow. But as he walked home, an unease began to stir within him: "Why should I suspect one so free from desire and attachment? Why would he not return what was entrusted to him? What cause would such a saint have for deception?" These thoughts troubled him through the night. With the dawn, after completing his morning ablutions, he resolved to go once more to Eknātha.

One morning, while Śrī Nātha was engaged in the worship of the Deity, the householder arrived and offered his respectful obeisance. Inquiring about the saint's well-being from beginning to end, he spoke of all that had occurred during his pilgrimage. Yet, though the conversation was full, not once did Eknātha think of returning the Touch stone.

At last, the householder, growing bold, reminded him directly of the treasure he had entrusted. Only then did the memory arise in Śrī Nātha's mind. He asked where he had placed it, and recalling, he said, "Ah, I set it beneath the seat." Calling the man to look, he searched with his own hands beneath the seat of state — but the stone was no longer there.

In that place, offerings of flowers and sacred leaves were kept for fifteen days and then, on the holy day of Hari, they were cast into the Godavari. Eknātha said simply, "When the offerings were discarded into the river, the Touch stone must have gone with them."

Hearing these words, the householder's heart began to pound. He said, "In the hope of reclaiming the stone, I returned home at once from my pilgrimage. I have no wife or son to bind me — but my mind is restless." Seeing his distress, Eknātha immediately took him to the Godavari. "If the stone fell into the waters, let us go at once and see," he said.

On reaching the river, the saint consoled him: "The offerings were cast into the Godavari, and there they will be found." Wading into the water, Eknātha gathered five or seven smooth stones in his hands and brought them forth.

He said to the householder, "Look among these and take your own Touch stone. Test them with some iron you have with you." The man touched each stone to the bit of iron in his hand, and lo — each one turned instantly into gold! Amazed beyond measure, he thought, "Even these, I could keep for myself…"

But Eknātha commanded, "Select the one that is yours, and offer the rest back to Mother Godavari, for they are preserved here by the Lord's grace." The householder took one and, as instructed, returned the others to the waters. Then, after the saint had bathed, they both returned to the temple.

The saint's wealth was not of this world. A poet's mind falters to describe such majesty, for as the scriptures declare, "Not this, not this" — how shall the mightiest of kings comprehend it? For the upliftment of the world, Lord Viṣṇu Himself sends his devotees in human form, and in His steadfastness to dharma, He performs righteous deeds for the welfare of all beings.

Thus did Eknātha live: rising at the fifth watch before dawn, performing his ablutions and cleansing of mouth, then bathing in the Godavari, and offering the sacred arghya to the sun. Establishing his daily discipline with certainty, he would worship the form of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga with incense, lamp, and the sacred maṅgala-ārati.

Afterward, he would listen to the Purāṇas, expounding their meaning and essence, then proceed to the Godavari to perform oblations for his forefathers with heartfelt devotion. At home, he maintained an unbroken practice of sadāvarta — the daily feeding of guests —

serving the brāhmaṇas with great joy, and partaking of the sanctified food himself only after their satisfaction. In the afternoon he would read the Bhāgavata with the commentary of Śrīdhara Svāmī.

At sunset he would again go to the Godavari for his evening prayers, then return home to perform the incense-ārati before the Lord. At night, the sound of cymbals and the sweet harmony of the mṛdaṅga filled the air, for Eknātha would hold joyous kīrtana. Devout men and women would gather in great numbers, sitting with reverent attention to hear the sacred songs. Tales of Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, and many other divine incarnations flowed from his own lips, steeped in the bliss of love. The listeners — young and old alike — swayed in rapture, their hearts immersed in joy.

Thus, as the day was ordered with proper worship and the night resounded with the chanting of the Lord's name, the saint maintained constant remembrance of Hari, delighting the very Life of the Universe. Seeing Eknātha's ceaseless service, even the Lord of all gods felt the weight of gratitude. "When," thought Keśava, "shall I ever repay such devotion?" His heart yearned to dwell with His servant.

So, assuming the form of a brāhmaṇa, Śrī Kṛṣṇa swiftly departed from Dvārakā and came to Pratiṣṭhāna, where He bathed in the Godavari. Then, proceeding to the home of Eknātha, the Lord stood at the door. Bowing with sincerity, He said, "I have come with firm resolve to serve you. You worship Viṣṇu and serve the brāhmaṇas with Vaiṣṇava devotion. It is My heart's desire to remain ever in your company."

He spoke further, "From birth I have served the saints out of pure love, never seeking any wage. I ask only for food sufficient to fill my belly. A simple blanket for covering, and sustenance for the body — I desire nothing more. Let me always remain in holy company."

But the divine play of the Lord's māyā is unfailing. Eknātha, who well knew the ways of Lakṣmī's Lord, asked gently, "From which place do you come? What is your family? To which branch of the Veda do you belong? And what is your name?"

Hearing this inquiry, the Life of the Universe replied, "I am alone in the world, without wife or son. My body is called Śrīkhaṇḍa, and I wander from land to land. I am a brāhmaṇa of the Ṛgveda. Wherever my heart delights, there I take up my dwelling. Now I have resolved to serve you, O beloved of Rukmiṇī."

Eknātha answered, "I have no pressing need for service, yet if you wish to labour here for food and cloth alone, then dwell here and pursue the supreme goal in comfort." At this nectar-like speech, the Giver of Liberation said, "Gladly will I serve you, eating only what is earned by the toil of my hands. For if I were to sit idle and eat, this body — which is itself perishable — would serve no purpose. Some good should be done for others; that is the true greatness of life."

Thus saying, He took up the water-yoke, resting it upon His shoulder, and went at once to fetch Godavari water, filling the great pots in the temple with His own hands.

O wonder! — He whose feet are worshipped by Brahmā himself, before whom even Śiva bows; He whose glories make the Vedas and Purāṇas speechless; that same Jagatjīvana, the Soul of the Universe, stood as a servant brāhmaṇa in Eknātha's house. In sweet humility He ate the remnants left by brāhmaṇas, delighting in the taste of service.

He who rests upon Śeṣa in the golden isle within the milk ocean, He who is the very Lord of Vaikuṇṭha — would rise at dawn without weariness and prepare the articles for worship of the Deity. That dark-hued, tender Lord, beloved of Rukmiṇī and famed as the giver of liberation, would crush the sandalwood with His own hands. From whose feet the Gaṅgā and Godavari herself flows forth — He fetched her waters for worship with loving care. The One adored by eight hundred and eighty thousand sages ground sandal paste; He who is never without Lakṣmī, and to whom the eight siddhis are handmaidens, strung garlands for the Lord's deity; He who is the source of light for sun, moon, and stars lit the temple lamp without the least thought for His own majesty.

Whenever Eknātha called, "Kṛṣṇa!," the Lord would instantly appear before him. And all the townsfolk marvelled greatly at the brāhmaṇa called Śrīkhaṇḍa, who laboured so joyfully in Eknātha's home without taking a single coin in payment. They spoke among themselves: "There is a brāhmaṇa in Eknātha's service who, without asking for reward, works with all his heart."

Unseen by Eknātha, the Lord would go to the temple and serve with joyous love, entirely forgetting His own supreme glory, standing humbly before His devotee.

In this manner, the Lord of the Universe remained in Pratiṣṭhāna for twelve years, performing this wondrous and hidden service. Meanwhile, in Dvārakā, there dwelt a brāhmaṇa who, with steadfast devotion, constantly remembered the name of the Lord in the hope of beholding Him face to face. Twelve years passed thus, yet the vision he sought did not come.

At last, one day, he undertook a fast unto death. That night, Mother Rukmiṇī appeared to him in a dream and spoke: "You have resolved upon this fast, yet know that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is not here in Dvārakā. In the city of Pratiṣṭhāna there lives an undivided devotee named Eknātha. There, in his home, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha Himself is engaged in service — carrying water in a yoke, grinding sandalwood, and serving as a humble brāhmaṇa. Go quickly to Pratiṣṭhāna, and there you shall see Śrī Kṛṣṇa."

Awakening from this vision, the brāhmaṇa reflected upon the clear sign given by Rukmiṇī. Hastening to Pratiṣṭhāna, he bathed in the Godavari. Bearing the kavadi upon his shoulder, he reached the banks of the Godavari at Shree Khandya. There he instantly recognized a certain Brahmin and asked, "Why has this debtor come here?" For I had already arranged a proper dwelling for myself and was joyfully passing the time. But Rukmini had revealed the matter entirely, and forthwith had sent him here.

Hearing this, the Lord of Dwaraka felt a deep shyness in His heart. Without delay He filled the water pots and hastened towards the dwelling. Entering the sanctum, He sat, grinding sandal paste, when the Brahmin, who had been sweeping the house, entered the courtyard of the Master.

Beholding the exalted Brahmin, Shreenath greeted him with reverent love, offering a warm embrace, and thus they met in perfect cordiality. Seating him with due honor, the Master inquired after his welfare. “From where have you come? What has brought you here? Tell me the cause of your journey.”

The Brahmin, bowing in loving devotion, narrated his tale: “I went to Dwaraka with a firm resolve to worship the deity of Shri Krishna. My intent was to behold His manifest form with my own eyes, and thus I performed austerities in that holy place. Then, in a dream, Rukmini herself revealed to me that Shri Krishna had gone to Paithan. There, she said, dwells a loving devotee named Eknath, in whose house He serves. Having seen this vision, I hastened here to have His darshan at once.”

Saying so, the Brahmin fell at the Master’s feet. Eknath, with a heart filled with wonder, said, “Know that Krishna pervades all space, down to the smallest atom, eternally and without absence. What place can be empty of Him?” But the Brahmin replied, “O Eknath, I care not for knowledge of Brahman; I wish to see Krishna of Shree Khandya with my own eyes. Show Him to me now in truth.”

“Your loving devotion, O Vaishnava, has laid a great weight upon me,” said Eknath. “For twelve years you have served steadfastly, yet destiny had not brought you this fruit.” Hearing the Brahmin’s words, Eknath was moved with wonder, and in love he called for Uddhava, bidding him to summon Krishna before the Brahmin.

At that very moment, within the shrine, there stood Shri Hari. In an instant He assumed His four-armed form, adorned with conch and discus, wearing a radiant crown that outshone the sun. Dark-hued and beautiful, the Lord of Vaikuntha brought peace to the heart at a single glance. Divine earrings flashed at His ears, the Kaustubha gem and Vaijayanti garland graced His chest, and the golden brilliance of His yellow garments dazzled the eyes. His feet bore delicate anklets, and both His hands were fragrant with sandal paste.

Standing at the doorway, the Lord of the universe beheld the Brahmin, who at once rushed forward and embraced His feet in fervent love. Eknath, his heart overwhelmed, said to the Lord reclining on Shesha, “Why have You troubled Yourself so for my sake?” Giving the Lord another embrace, he continued, “O Shri Hari, how can this be fitting? You have taken the form of a mortal Brahmin and borne the toil Yourself. Your glory is such that even the thousand-mouthed Shesha is wearied in speaking it, and Brahma himself falls silent. You, the purifier of the fallen, have bound anklets to Your feet—this cannot be false even at the end of the aeon, for I have experienced it in my own soul.”

Thus Eknath praised Him and bowed again and again. Then the husband of Rukmini said, “Blessed indeed is your pure devotion. Before this, assuming the form of Vitthala, I stood for twelve years listening to the Dhrupad hymns you sang. Then, in the form of Keshava, I heard the recitation of the Bhagavata from your own lips for another twelve years. Yet you knew it not.”

Eknath replied, “O life of the world, all-pervading One, ornament of devotees, Your deeds, O enchanter of the mind, are beyond the knowing even of Brahma himself.” While they conversed thus, Shri Hari suddenly vanished from sight. The Brahmin, clasping Eknath’s feet, declared, “Among householders, you alone are truly blessed. For though Krishna Himself was near, we failed to recognize Him—yet you have given me His direct darshan today.”

The ascetic, his mind filled with bliss, dined in the company of Eknath, and for several days he remained there, listening to Shri Hari’s kirtan, worshiping Vishnu, hearing the Puranas, and bathing daily in the Ganga. Shreenath himself, none other than Krishna, shone forth in complete loving devotion.

On another occasion, while performing kirtan, the assembly of pious listeners swelled greatly, men and women thronging the courtyard. Their chanting of the divine Name resounded so loudly that the heavens seemed filled with its echo. With clapping and shouts of victory, the company of devotees rejoiced, and in their midst the gods themselves, unseen, took their places.

Names such as Krishna, Vishnu, Meghashyama, Achyuta, Ananta, Purushottama, Bali-bandhana, Trivikrama, and victorious Rama of the Raghu clan flowed from Eknath’s lips, steeped in love. His mind was so bound to the divine that bodily awareness nearly ceased.

At such a moment, four thieves entered and thought, “When this man rises and leaves, we shall take our opportunity to act.” But none could fathom the depth of the kirtan’s sanctity, and while they awaited its conclusion, their evil resolve lay dormant. When the auspicious mangal arati was lit and the husband of Rukmini was waved before all, sweet offerings were distributed to the devotees, who then departed to their homes.

The thieves, hiding behind a wall, sat for four hours in vain, while Uddhava barred the main door and quickly fell asleep. Ekanath Himself sat easily upon His seat, holding His remembrance in hand, His mind free from all sloth, ever satisfied in the bliss of His own being.

At that time, Uddhava and Girijabai were deep in slumber, when a band of thieves stealthily entered the house. They searched for valuables in every corner, yet what they beheld filled them with wonder, for Lord Panduranga Himself was watching over the dwelling. All at once, their eyes lost sight; a sudden blindness overcame them, and they could see nothing at all. Even though a lamp burned brightly in the temple room, to them it was as though all light had been extinguished. Whispering among themselves in confusion, they wondered how they might proceed, but their feet could not find the threshold, nor could they tell where the

steps lay. In their groping, they struck their heads against the cot and murmured to one another, “Some divine power has thwarted us; surely this is the doing of God.”

Regret arose in their hearts, and they said, “This Eknath is a true devotee of Lord Vishnu. We have come here to rob him, and for this reason we have been struck down. To live without eyes is to live in vain; better we surrender our lives now, for in seeking to trouble a servant of Vishnu, we have provoked the Lord of Rukmini to anger.” Speaking thus among themselves, they continued wandering through the courtyard, until by chance they came upon the sanctum and found themselves standing before the Lord. A wondrous thing then occurred—their sight returned in an instant. A deep remorse filled them, and they bowed with heartfelt reverence. By the merit of beholding the Lord, all wickedness departed from their bodies, and with folded hands the four thieves began to praise Him with sincere devotion.

They said, “You are dear devotee of Lord Panduranga, though we in our folly knew it not. In haste we came to deceive You, and this is the offence we beg You to pardon.” Eknath replied, “Who are you, and why do you offer such praises? If you hold any wish in your hearts, speak it plainly.” They answered, “We are thieves, come here with intent to steal. We searched for valuables but could not see the least thing. As if bereft of our senses, we wandered aimlessly about your house, and knowing a great sin had been committed, we have come before You.”

Hearing these words, the ocean of peace and compassion that was Eknath was moved to pity. He said, “You have endured much toil. Since you have come to my house, you should not leave empty-handed.” He then took them to the storeroom and showed them all that was there, saying, “Whatever pleases your hearts, take it freely. If you perform good deeds, no blame will ever cling to you. Peace and forgiveness are my way, for all things here are the Lord’s.”

The thieves, beholding such serenity, felt wisdom dawn within them. They desired no possessions, but only the Lord’s grace for the sake of their sustenance. Eknath then awakened Uddhava and Girijabai, saying, “The cooking is complete; now is the time to serve.” At his command, the meal was quickly prepared, and Eknath himself served the thieves with love, feeding them as one would honored guests—just as worldly folk treat a son-in-law with great respect, so did he treat these men. He even prepared betel leaves with his own hands and gave them, then escorted them courteously to the street.

From that day forward, the thieves abandoned their life of crime, holding only pure devotion in their hearts, and took to the worship of Lord Hari. Such was the nature of Eknath Maharaj—that he regarded the whole world as his own self, seeing friend and foe alike with equal vision, and acting in ways wondrous and unparalleled. Whoever walks with the innocence of a child is indeed an incarnation of God, and his very sight redeems the soul. Hearing his holy fame destroys even the gravest sins, granting liberation and ending the cycle of birth.

Blessed indeed is the land of Paithan, where Eknath took birth, for there the people witness with their own eyes the divine deeds he performed. Once, there was a certain man hardened in his ways, who for the sake of his belly took to thievery. After many days, he was caught red-handed. The householder bound him and brought him to the magistrate, who beat him severely and then cast him into a cell. They demanded money for his release, but he had none to give. Many days passed without food, his body grew weak like a dry stick, and he seemed near death. At last, seeing he would not live for more than two or three days, they removed his chains and let him go.

Even then, he had no strength to flee, and none offered him protection. One night, reflecting upon his broken fetters, he thought, "I must leave this place quickly." But his body could not carry him far. Remembering God, he prayed, "O Lord, I am an orphan and a sinner, long imprisoned. By Your grace, O dark-blue One, deliver me from here at once." As he thus contemplated, he heard the sound of kirtan in the distance. Dragging himself toward it despite his fear, he came at last to Eknath's open door, where he beheld the courtyard and entered, seating himself quietly in a corner.

Hearing the holy singing, his heart grew calm. The power of Eknath's words held the listeners spellbound; all present cried "Blessed, blessed!" for this was truly a place of rest for the soul. After two watches of the night had passed, the auspicious arati was sung, the devotees shouted joyfully, and all bowed before the Lord. Taking the sacred prasada, the people departed for their homes.

Uddhava then barred the gate, not seeing the stranger hidden within. Girijabai, the devoted disciple, was asleep. Eknath, seated upon his seat, happened to notice the man, whose body lay in the courtyard like a corpse, though he yet lived. Moved with compassion, the Lord's servant approached and, finding the man unable to speak, understood from his signs that he was famished. Going into the house, he awoke his wife, who placed her head at his feet in reverence and asked for his command. Eknath said, "There is a sick and starving man in our courtyard; quickly prepare something for him to eat."

Obeying at once, she lit the stove, and finding a little wheat ready at hand, she cooked it with sugar and milk. Bringing the food to the courtyard, Eknath himself served it into a bowl. Knowing that one who has been without food for many days may die if fed too much, he gave a measured portion, offering it with his own loving hands.

Śrīnātha, moved with boundless compassion, took a little water in an earthen vessel, sanctified it with His touch, and gave it to the dying man to drink. The moment it touched his lips, life seemed to stir again within him. His vital breath, which had almost departed, returned to its seat. Regaining a little strength, the man—once a prisoner—looked upon Śrīnātha with tearful gratitude.

“O Compassionate One, Friend of the forsaken!” he exclaimed, “Blessed, blessed is this gracious act of Thine. To me, an orphan without refuge, Thou hast given life anew, removing the great weariness from my body.”

He then began to recount his sorrowful tale: “I am of the lowest caste, a Mahar by birth. Out of hunger I had taken to theft, stealing for the sake of filling my belly. When the officials discovered the truth of my deeds, they beat me severely. My body became frail and wasted. At last they cast me out from the prison compound. In that state, upon hearing the sound of Hari’s kīrtana, I dragged myself here with my last strength.”

Hearing this confession from the nameless wanderer, Śrīnātha quickly offered him words of comfort. “Remain here,” He said gently, “until strength returns to your limbs.” Clothes were given to him, and he was allowed to rest in a warm, sheltered place. Śrīnātha then returned to His own dwelling, sitting in serene remembrance of the Divine Name.

The man, taking some rest, fell into deep sleep. At dawn he awoke and went to bathe in the waters of the Godavari. He completed all his morning observances and then sat quietly. Śrīnātha, without delay, sent word to the village official: “The prisoner whom you held came to our home last night.”

The official replied with due respect, acknowledging the message and saying, “We shall not inflict any punishment upon him; that much we promise,” and thus sent the messenger back.

When the time for the brāhmaṇas’ meal arrived, Śrīnātha served food to them, and gave the man also a portion, increasing it generously. That night, the man sat listening with joy to the kīrtana of the Lord. Strength began to flow back into his body, and the food of Śrīnātha removed all evil tendencies from his mind. A change came over him—he began to chant the holy names of Śrī Hari with sincere love.

Thus ends this episode. The next chapter will narrate a beautiful story concerning Śrī Rukmiṇī, wherein a certain king received fearless assurance from her Lord. By this gracious prasāda, the account has been recorded in this holy Bhakta Līlāmṛta. Truly, the very hearing of this work fulfils the heart’s deepest desires. May loving devotees drink its nectar with joy—for this twentieth chapter is indeed most sweet.

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Chapter 21

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Lord Ganesha)

Just as a benefactor is the refuge of a supplicant, as the sighted one is the guide to the blind, even so is Panduranga, the radiant Lord of wisdom, my sole refuge; for besides Him I have none. To such a Master, the lives of His devotees are sweet and pleasing; therefore, as a pretext, He manifests occasions before the world, yet dwelling within the devotee's heart, He never allows the intellect to be ensnared in doubts. Even when they are asleep, He awakens them; even in dreams He grants remembrance of Himself; and in the heart He firmly plants the resolve to cherish the life-stories of saints, for these are dear to Shri Hari.

It is for the upliftment of the world that the Lord Himself chooses to be born as a devotee, so that through His own conduct, noble fame may shine among men. This same Lord of Pandharpur is the remover of fear, the destroyer of fear itself, the gentle sustainer of the world, and the one whom the sage Dvaipayana has praised in the Vishnu Sahasranama.

In the previous account it was told how Eknath sheltered a crippled man named Anamik. The compassion He displayed is spoken of by the people as pure, disinterested, and full of love. Yet, many great scholars, learned Brahmins, and upholders of dharma, both before and after the incident, expressed their doubts, saying, "What the Eknath has done is improper." For Anamik, a thief by profession, had been kept in confinement in the fort for many days, whereby he had been defiled in conduct and had caused defilement to others.

They reasoned: "Even if this act be one of charity, what necessity was there for such charity? To feed a thief is only to increase his wickedness. Just as stroking a scorpion does not remove its sting, or giving milk to a serpent does not stop it from striking, so too will a thief, if maintained in one's house, only grow in his thieving." Thus spoke the custodians of religion.

Yet those of gentle heart recalled another wondrous incident and related it thus: One day, as Shri Nath (Eknath) was going for His bath, there stood on the path a great peepal tree, and from it suddenly emerged a Brahma-rakshasa, a demonic spirit. Standing before the Lord with folded hands, it declared, "By the sight of You I am now redeemed, O uplifter of the fallen. Long ago, through hatred of Brahmins, I was cast into this low birth, and now I have no other desire save one. Many times you have fed Brahmins, and once you gave food at night to the prisoner in your house; these two merits are yours. If you would grant me one of them in full measure, placing the water of its transfer into my hands, I would at once be delivered."

Hearing these words, Eknath, who had descended for the salvation of all beings, replied, "I see neither sin nor merit; ask of Me today whatever you desire." The Brahma-rakshasa, out of pure devotion, answered, "The merit of your protecting that prisoner—grant this to me."

Then Eknath, taking water in His hands, offered that merit to the spirit. The moment the water touched its hands, the demon was freed and attained liberation.

The Brahmins of the holy place who saw this marvel were filled with wonder. The spirit, now clad in a divine body, swiftly departed on the path to heaven, while the people resounded the name of Hari and praised the greatness of Eknath. Even those who had spoken ill before were silenced in heart, and all declared, "Blessed, blessed is this wondrous deed." Thus was the extraordinary power of selfless service made manifest to all, and Anamik, whom the Lord had sheltered, continued his worship of the Lord with true devotion.

When strength returned to his body, Anamik departed for his home. Such is Shri Nath (Eknath)—the benefactor of the world, the compassionate one, who has descended for the deliverance of all.

In the month of Ashadha, pilgrimages to Pandharpur were customarily undertaken, with bathing in the Chandrabhaga and the blessed sight of Lord Panduranga. Many would set out in the company of Shri Nath (Eknath), listening with love to the singing of the Lord's praises. The tradition of the Pandharpur pilgrimage had been established by Bhanudas, and the vow he began was faithfully continued, never diminished in fervour.

In the sacred city of Pratishthan, the people daily heard the chanting of Hari's glories, listening to the gracious words of Shri Nath, who would illustrate the truths of scripture with fresh examples. It was he who, in Sanskrit, composed commentaries, though he himself was unconcerned with his own fame, and the blessed ones rejoiced to hear his words. The four-verse Bhagavata, containing the highest and most hidden meaning, he explained with great clarity by the command of his revered guru.

Many other compositions and abhangas describing the Lord's wondrous deeds were written by him, as well as a lucid commentary in the vernacular on the profound Hastamalaka stotra. He also expounded the Shukashtaka, speaking with delight of the joy of the Self, and the devotees, hearing him, were filled with satisfaction. The saints and faithful, with sincere feeling, requested of him that he should also explain in the same manner the Bhakti-raharya of the Bhagavata.

They said, "Even though the ancient and supreme Uddhava-gita is in Sanskrit, when you explain it in the common tongue, it becomes of great benefit to many." Seeing the earnest desire of the listeners, Shri Nath began his vernacular commentary on the Eleventh Canto of the Bhagavata. In only a few days, two chapters were completed, when one day a certain noble Brahmin householder arrived, and on seeing this work, he was greatly gladdened.

After receiving instruction from the Lord, this Brahmin would read the work daily with devotion. Soon, having set his heart on undertaking a great pilgrimage, he chose an auspicious day, gathered his family, and, taking the Lord's permission, departed at once. Journeying with the pilgrimage party, he came to the great and holy city, bathed in the sacred Bhagirathi, and worshipped Lord Vishweshwara.

According to the sacred custom, the pious householder observed all the rites befitting a pilgrim, and during the holy period of the Chaturmas, he remained in that blessed place. Each day, with heartfelt devotion, he would read two chapters from the Bhagavata Purana along with the commentary composed by the noble Eknath.

On the banks of the hallowed Manikarnika, he would take his purifying bath, then seat himself with due reverence. Twelve marks of Gopichandana adorned his body, and the holy tulasi garlands graced his neck. In that sanctified posture, he would recite the sacred text with genuine love for its meaning.

One day, as he thus engaged himself in the nectar of scripture, an unexpected incident arose. In the same vicinity, a great renunciate of profound learning was dwelling, absorbed in the study of the Shastras. Two of his disciples had gone to the river for their ablutions, and as they returned, they beheld the householder seated and reading.

This householder, a native of Paithan, was sitting with dignity upon a seat. When the disciples saw his noble bearing, they took him for a learned Brahmin and said among themselves, “Let us see what scripture and commentary he is reading.” They drew near and, addressing him in the classical Sanskrit tongue, asked politely, “O learned one, what Shastra is this upon which you are engaged? Kindly tell us for our understanding.”

The householder replied humbly, “This is the Eleventh Canto of the Bhagavata Purana. I am reading a commentary upon it composed in the Prakrit language, and it is my daily practice to study it.”

The disciples, intrigued, said, “Read aloud clearly so that we too may hear.” The householder, delighted and filled with affectionate enthusiasm, read with a voice both melodious and dignified, pronouncing every word with accuracy and sweetness, leaving nothing deficient nor excessive in sense. The disciples marvelled, saying, “Blessed indeed is the speech of such a virtuous man! Yet if such a commentary in the Prakrit language becomes popular among the people, who will then read the Sanskrit original?”

Speaking thus in Sanskrit between themselves, they decided that this matter must be reported to their preceptor so that action might be taken. Signalling to each other, they agreed that one would remain there to keep watch, while the other would hasten to the monastery to inform the master.

The disciple hurried to the Swami and said, “At the Manikarnika ghats, a Brahmin householder is seated, reading a Prakrit commentary on the Bhagavata. Since you are the spiritual authority of this holy place, it is fitting that you instruct him, for if such a practice is accepted by all, who will then consult the traditional Purāṇikas?”

Hearing this, the renunciate’s heart was stirred with anger. “Bring him here at once,” he commanded. “We shall then correct him.”

Seven or eight disciples immediately set out. They approached the householder who was seated with his book, and spoke sternly: “Gather your manuscript and come at once to the Swami’s monastery.” The householder, now filled with fear, remembered the lotus feet of his beloved Eknath for courage. Wrapping the manuscript quickly, he followed them to the monastery, where he entered, offered respectful salutations, and stood humbly.

The renunciate gestured to him to sit, while the disciples addressed him in Sanskrit. But he, unaccustomed to that language, did not fully understand their words and answered simply in Prakrit. They asked, “Who is the author of this commentary? Is it the work of some poet, or have you composed it yourself? Speak truthfully without hesitation.”

The householder replied, “In the sacred town of Paithan upon the banks of the Godavari lives a venerable saint named Eknath. Constant in Vishnu worship, ever engaged in Hari-kirtan, daily serving holy men and Brahmins, and performing the rites of sacred waters—by the blessing of his Guru, he conceived the inspiration to compose a commentary in Prakrit upon the Eleventh Canto. He began this labour with great love, and two chapters had been completed. I, a simple and ignorant householder, copied them and now read them for my own understanding.”

The renunciate then said, “There is no fault in you. The author himself must be called here and corrected. In Paithan there are learned Brahmins who are the keepers of religious order—how have they permitted such a commentary to be written in Prakrit?”

So saying, he ordered his disciples to write a letter to the Brahmins of Paithan: “The essence of the Vedas and Shastras was distilled by Vyasa into the Bhagavata Purana, and within it the Uddhava Gita contains the very meaning of the Upanishads. Yet a certain Eknath of your town, though a man of poetic skill, has written a commentary upon it in Prakrit. This is most improper. You, as wise and eminent Brahmins, should assemble in unity, discipline him, and send him here at once. We shall also send two of our students to accompany your representatives, so that in debate he may be defeated without delay.”

A second letter was addressed directly to Eknath himself: “Come here immediately, bringing with you the Prakrit commentary upon the Bhagavata.”

The two letters were entrusted to the students, and the two chapters in the householder’s possession were taken as evidence. The students travelled swiftly and, arriving in Paithan, performed their ablutions and sandhya rites before meeting with the Dharma-adhikari, the religious head of the place. They delivered the letter and reported all that had happened.

The Brahmins, upon hearing the contents, murmured among themselves, “Though dwelling in a sacred place, he engages in such unorthodox acts! Yet, being highly honoured here, neither the chief officer nor the wealthy patrons dare to oppose him. Still, if you wish to defeat him, we shall all support you.”

Some among them urged, “Call him at once and defeat him in debate.” Others said, “Let him not perform his head-shaving ritual at the holy river, for that will bring him dishonour.” Still others remarked, “He began this Prakrit commentary for his own renown; now, in this great pilgrimage city, his humiliation will be certain.”

The students from Varanasi, confident in their learning, boasted, “We shall easily defeat him, for he is surely misguided.” In due time, accompanied by several local Brahmins, they came to Eknath’s residence. The saint received them warmly, rose to greet them, and offered them seats of honour.

They inquired respectfully, “In which sacred place do you dwell, O embodiment of compassion?” Then, placing the letter in his hand, they bowed and stood before him. Eknath read it clearly, his heart filled with joy. Looking upon the Brahmins, he said gently, “The remembrance of Lord Vishweshvara has arisen within me, and therefore I have been summoned for this meeting.”

Thus resolved, he said, “We shall journey to Varanasi at once.” Calling his disciple Uddhava, he instructed him, “Gather all our works and secure everything in readiness, for we must depart.”

The worship of Lord Vishnu, the study of the Purāṇas, the offering of perpetual food to Brahmins, and the nightly singing of the Lord’s praises—these were duties over which you hold sovereign choice. Hearing this, Uddhava at once bowed low in reverence, eager to act without delay. Great was the joy of Śrīnātha (Eknath), for it was the time to set forth on the grand pilgrimage.

Śrīnātha would often feel compassion for the ascetic students, for on their journeys they endured much hardship and went long without proper meals. In this very instance, all the comings and goings had taken place on account of us. Hearing thus, the noble Brahmin smiled gently and said, “The head of the religious order has already gone home and partaken of his meal. I, however, am fully contented by the sight of you.”

He had set out with the thought of speaking harshly, but the moment his eyes beheld Śrīnātha, all evil intent melted away, leaving his mind purified. The students, watching this change, whispered among themselves in awe, “Blessed indeed is his devotion; blessed indeed is his spiritual state.”

Unseen informers of the head of the order were present there and beheld everything. They hastened back to their master with the full account, saying, “At the mere sight of Eknātha, the Brahmin from Kāśī was overcome and subdued. In an instant he became meek and humbled, for the Saint cast a spell of divine attraction upon him.”

On hearing this, the head of the order was astonished. “To vanquish an enemy with reverence—this indeed is the surest stratagem. Such is Eknātha’s way.” Just as the sage Bṛgu once struck Viṣṇu with his foot and yet Viṣṇu retained all divine majesty, so too did Śrīnātha

remain ever in the state of perfect forbearance. Whoever came to oppose him, he would fall repeatedly at that person's feet, until anger was dispelled and compassion took its place. Even when harm was plotted against him, Providence would turn it into good; when infamy was spoken, lasting fame arose, for divine aid was ever with him.

Thus thought the dwellers of the holy place, keeping this truth in their hearts, that the story would spread and the righteous would hear it. At that time, the students who had been sent to fetch Eknātha returned with him. He had in his possession notes upon the Fifth Chapter, and as they walked he imparted its meanings.

Suddenly, without preparation, they set forth on the road; and from behind, Uddhava sent two Brahmins to serve and accompany him. In due course, Eknātha joined company with the Kāśī Brahmins and travelled of his own accord until, one day, they unexpectedly reached Ānandavana.

After bathing in the sacred Gaṅgā, Śrīnātha sat in serene composure. The ascetic students approached with heartfelt reverence, saying, "By your grace, let us quickly return to Pratiṣṭhāna, for we have brought the commentator as commanded; the rest you may consider in due time."

The master replied, "At this moment, we are going out for alms. Seat him within the monastery until our return." Saying thus, he departed, taking with him three hundred disciples.

The students, remaining at the Gaṅgā's bank, led Eknātha to the monastery and seated him there until the master should arrive. With quiet dignity, Śrīnātha sat, his heart free from elation or disquiet, a state that would endure to the end of ages.

When the alms-round was complete, the master instructed his disciples, "Go into the monastery and do exactly as I say. There is a certain poet in Paiṭhaṇ who composes the Bhāgavata in the Prākṛta language; the students have brought him here. Each of you, five at a time, shall strike him with your staff. If he survives, then bring him before me for contemplation."

Obeying the command, the three hundred set forth, yet as they walked they pondered deeply: "The master is a venerable soul. If we strike a Brahmin unto death, the sin will be terrible. Better to learn what worship, what devotion, what spiritual state has brought him to the attainment of divine knowledge."

Thus resolved, they stood at the monastery door, saying, "Let us each go in alone and see for ourselves." One by one, the ascetics entered. There they beheld Eknātha seated in tranquil stillness, yet to their eyes he appeared as the great devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa. With pure feeling they bowed low, then stood with hands joined, declaring, and "Here before us is the great devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa."

All three hundred saw likewise, and each proclaimed, “This is none other than the great devotee of Lord Nārāyaṇa manifest for the upliftment of the world.” They felt that Lord Janārdana himself now dwelt in their hearts. “Had we obeyed our master’s words blindly,” they thought, “great harm would have been done.”

In unison, they prostrated before the Saint and remained standing with folded hands, affirming, “Here is the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha in person.”

One student returned to the master and reported, “You sent the ascetics in haste to strike Eknātha, but instead they have all bowed to him and stand in reverence. To me this is most wondrous.”

Hearing this, the master’s mind burned with wrath, even as Hiraṇyakaśipu raged when Prahlāda sought refuge in Śrī Hari, or as Rāvaṇa trembled in fury when Vibhīṣaṇa submitted to Raghunātha. It was the same with the master: disciples of his own order had forsaken his command and sought shelter with Eknātha.

“How has he mastered such an art,” the master wondered, “that by mere sight he casts a net of enchantment?” He ordered, “Place a screen around my seat so that his gaze may not fall upon me, for he turns all toward his own side, even those engaged in worldly writings.”

The disciple hastened to obey, setting up the screen, then entered by another doorway. Eknātha sat composed, while the disciples stood at the door, beholding with their own eyes the great devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Their bodies trembled and doubts vanished, and they stood in perfect detachment.

With love, they addressed him directly: “All the merit of our austerities has borne fruit today, for before us stands the dear devotee of Lord of Vaikuṇṭha. It is by the grace of our master that we are granted this vision, just as Śiśupāla and Vakradanta were liberated despite their enmity.”

Hearing the disciples’ account, the master himself was astonished, unable to fathom how such a charm had been wrought upon them all. He then had a seat placed nearby, with the screen still between them, and at last the great head of the order spoke directly to Eknātha: “Of all debaters, I am the foremost. Yet here I have been deceived, my pride humbled. In open contest I shall now face you.”

Hearing the reply, which still bore a shade of pride, Śrīnātha — the ocean of peace and compassion — did not take offence in the least. Without the faintest trace of displeasure in His heart, He prepared to speak words sweet and gracious.

“O noble master, most excellent among the renunciates, to You I bow with all sincerity, laying my head at Your holy feet. I am but an orphan in the world — grant me, out of Your boundless mercy, the blessed sight of Your presence. With fatherly affection for a child, You summoned me here for darśana. I have journeyed step by step along a long and difficult path; then why, upon my arrival, has a curtain been drawn before me?

If I have committed any offence, knowingly or unknowingly, forgive me in this moment. As for my intellect, if You wish to examine it, You will find in me no great refinement of culture. I am devoid of pure devotion, lacking in true feeling; without knowledge, without detachment, without the merit of Vedic study or the learning of the śāstras.

Whatever little poetic inspiration I have is only through the merit of serving Your feet. For this reason alone, I began, according to my limited capacity, the composition of a commentary upon the Bhāgavata, starting with the Panchādhyāyī in the Eleventh Skandha. That much alone stands completed in my work. I humbly pray that You glance upon it, consider it in its true state, and bring its meaning into Your meditation.

If, upon examining my writing, You find my explanations faulty, there is no cause for me to despair — for what is there to fear when one's work may be immersed in the waters of Maṇikarṇikā? You are dear to Lord Nārāyaṇa, endowed with perfect knowledge in this great tīrtha. If You will not accept my method, how then will the world receive it?

Therefore, show me mercy now; remove all harsh thoughts from Your mind. I am a helpless one; grant me but the blessing of Your darśana, and by that alone I shall be delivered."

Such was the nectarean speech of the Master, Eknath. Hearing it with his own ears, the sannyāsī's anger dissolved at once, and the quality of sattva blossomed within his heart. The darkness of ignorance — like the blackness of night — which had shrouded his inner being, was dispelled as the sun of knowledge arose.

In that transformed state of mind, the sannyāsī now spoke with folded hands: "Śrīnātha is no mere man — He is indeed the great devotee of Supreme Lord. He has descended from Vaikuṇṭha Lokas to redeem the world, and here He comes to the monastery, granting darśana freely. He is not human in truth, but the great personality. Let the curtain be drawn aside without delay, that we may behold His form with our own eyes."

Hearing these words of a true devotee, the sannyāsī's heart melted. In that very instant, they removed the curtain — and lo! before his eyes shone Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The very transcendental form described in the Bhāgavata by great poets in loving devotion now stood visible, and the sannyāsī's heart was filled with deep remorse. Crying "Save me! Save me!" he cast away all pride, and without the slightest bodily reservation, fell in full prostration at the Lord's feet. Śrī Kṛṣṇa to attaract the sannyāsīs and protect Ekanath, he himself appeared to sannyāsī. When sannyāsī fell at his feet, Śrī Kṛṣṇa disappeared and Śrīnātha (Eknath) raised him up with His own hands. Overwhelmed, the sannyāsī roared with the cry of "Victory! Victory!" and declared, "Today I am delivered!" Saying "Oṁ Namo Nārāyaṇa," he bowed low, adding, "Master, it is improper for me to be honoured thus — for among all the āśramas, You alone are supreme."

Hearing these words of Eknātha, the sannyāsī was struck with wonder. "Displaying such marvellous līlās to our eyes," he said, "You have confirmed the truths of the śāstras." With

his mind now firmly established in the highest state, the sannyāsī seated Śrīnātha upon the āsana, and himself sat close by, joyfully unrolling the manuscript of the commentary.

One verse's exposition in the Panchādhyāyī was read aloud, and its flawless knowledge brought satisfaction to all who listened. Then, in the company of the true Guru, all assembled entered into deliberation. With folded hands they made this request to Śrīnātha: "You have described to us the Panchādhyāyī of the Eleventh Skandha. Now, we pray, complete the entire Eleventh Skandha in full. Until the commentary is thus complete, remain here in blissful fellowship — such is our heart's desire."

Śrīnātha, assenting with the words "So be it," bowed to their request. Then, with joy in his heart, he resumed work upon the commentary. Each day's portion, as it was completed, the sannyāsī would read and examine, bringing its meaning into meditation through the Sanskrit exposition, and finding not the least shortcoming therein.

In the course of six months, the work was brought to completion. Yet within it the hidden secrets of bhakti were so richly expressed that all who heard were deeply gladdened in spirit.

When the assembly in the monastery gathered each day, the presiding master and the assembled devotees would listen, night after night, to the sacred narration. Joy and contentment overflowed in every heart, and all were inwardly immersed in the bliss of the Self. When this portion of the holy text had reached its conclusion, the Mahant, filled with an ardent resolve, thought within himself that now, with great zeal, the monastery should celebrate and worship the goddess Sarasvati. Holding this resolve firmly in his heart, he began making preparations without delay, and also sent word to other learned scholars dwelling in the sacred place, requesting their presence.

Among the revered works, there was the Bhagavata Purana upon which the saint Eknath had composed a commentary in the Prakrit tongue, speaking and explaining it in his own voice. Reading its meaning and perceiving its sweetness, many felt deep joy and love. Yet when the work's completion was announced, murmurs of criticism arose among certain scholars. "This," they said, "is an unprecedented matter — a commentary on the Bhagavata in Prakrit! Such a thing is contrary to tradition." They lamented that the age of Kali had indeed begun, and that strange doctrines were spreading. They feared that the revered Swami had been misled, and concluded that the commentary must be destroyed without delay.

In their counsel, they claimed, "The Bhagavata Purana is the distilled essence of the Vedic wisdom; to render it in Prakrit is a deviation from its dignity. Just as in ancient times sage Vyasa had submerged the Bharata composed by Jaimini, and as the great teachers had consigned heretical Jain scriptures to the waters, so must this Prakrit commentary be cast into the Manikarnika Ghat. Doing so will uphold the honor of the sacred place and gladden the Brahmin community."

These scholars, well-versed in the Vedas and Vedanta, came to the Swami, offered full prostrations, and spoke courteously: "O Master, you are the seat of all learning, the supreme

Guru, the honored sage of the fourth ashrama, the highest among the revered. Yet you have approved the Prakrit commentary of Eknath. This is contrary to the true import of the Vedas. Therefore, we request that this work be consigned to the holy waters."

Hearing this, the Swami — the head of the ascetics — replied gently, "You have misunderstood greatly. This Eknath is no ordinary man; he is verily the great devotee of Lord Vishnu. His work should be honored with mantras and worshipped, not destroyed." He tried in many ways to instruct them, but the scholars remained firm in their opposition. At last, from the Swami's own hands, the manuscript was taken. The scholars rose swiftly and proceeded to immerse it in the Manikarnika waters.

But behold a wonder! As they attempted to submerge it, the goddess Ganga herself, lifting her hands from the sacred current, caught the manuscript and held it above the water. Her wrists were adorned with jewel-encrusted bangles and her fingers with shining divine rings. The moment the people beheld her holding the book, amazement seized the crowd, and devotees clapped their hands in joy, praising the Lord aloud. The ascetic exclaimed, "Lord Chandramouli has blessed me today!"

Then the chief among the sannyasis leapt into the waters, took the manuscript from her divine hands, and, holding it to his head in love and reverence, brought it ashore. Placing it before the scholars, he urged, "Now be mindful — go, surrender yourselves to Eknath." At these words, the scholars bowed their heads at the Swami's lotus feet, confessing, "We have been unjust. We did not heed you. Now we know the truth — Eknath is indeed the great devotee of Supreme Lord."

With pure hearts, they returned to the monastery with the saint, placing the rescued book before him. "This," they said, "is your blessed speech, preserved by the very hands of the goddess Bhagirathi." Seeing the assembled scholars and ascetics, the Swami bowed to them in return, and commanded that Eknath be honored with loving worship. He further instructed, "If one seeks to cross the ocean of worldly existence, one must render service to the saints. Let no unworthy act be done."

Thus ended that episode, and in the following chapter, the narration would delight the devoted and kindle detachment in the hearts of listeners. Even kings rejoiced to hear the wondrous account of the Lord's deeds. Blessed indeed is the Bhaktalilamrita, which fulfills the heart's deepest longing through the sweetness of its recitation. This was the twenty-first chapter, rich with devotional nectar.

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Chapter 22

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ.

All glory to the Lord of Paṇḍharī, the Jagadguru, whose unfathomable Vaiṣṇava māyā bewilders even the gods. Even Brahmā and the great beings are unable to fully grasp the origin of this divine power; yet by certain signs it becomes known. Were one to attempt to describe Thy greatness, O Lord, the Vedas and Śāstras themselves could never reach its shore. And here I am—a lowly servant, poor, ignorant, and dull-witted—what could I possibly say? I possess not the purity of speech, nor the varied elegance of the celestial tongue. I have not fixed in my heart the clear understanding of divine truth. My words stumble and scatter without proper order. Yet, O compassionate Lord, consort of Rukmiṇī, there arises within my heart the conviction that Thou art indeed present before me. But how such a truth might be rightly expressed—this I cannot tell. Thou art the inner witness, the dense mass of consciousness, who awakens the remembrance of Thyself in the mind. By Thy own will Thou keepest Thy divine sports hidden, and yet makest them known to me, Thy dependent servant. That Thou should reveal to one so dull the most exalted of all sacred accounts—this is a marvel indeed, O Pāṇḍuraṅga.

Once, to humble the pride of Nārada, Thou didst place a vina in the hands of a mere bear, making it sing melodious praises—an impossible wonder brought to pass solely by Thy will, O Śrī Hari.

At the close of the preceding chapter it was told how the Bhāgavata composed by Śrīnātha was cast into the waters by jealous scholars, and how the sacred Gaṅgā herself bore it up. At that time, an eminent sannyāsī, bathing in her stream, retrieved it with his own hands. When all returned to the monastery, he came into the presence of Śrīnātha.

The sannyāsī, together with the learned brāhmaṇas, offered their respectful greetings. But the master said with gentle reproach, “You have cast down our honor.” Then, calling for the full ceremonial offerings, the sannyāsī instructed the scholars to worship Śrīnātha fittingly, with hearts intent upon the inner meaning. Though their hearts were not wholly reconciled, the brāhmaṇas, seeing the wonders wrought, bowed at his feet.

At that moment Eknātha humbly entreated them, “Do not act in any way that is improper. I am but the servant of the servants of the brāhmaṇas, holding fast to the hope of true grace. Worship this sacred text with devotion—that will bring me satisfaction.”

Hearing these words of the Master, all assented. Then the sannyāsī brought forth an elephant, richly caparisoned, with a gilded howdah and silken canopies. In that hour the splendid beast, adorned with golden ornaments and brocaded cloths, was led forth. The sannyāsī urged the Master, Eknath, to seat himself in the howdah with the Bhāgavata.

Śrīnātha replied, “This I cannot do. Place only the sacred text in the howdah—that is proper. As for me, I am wholly surrendered to the dust of the Lord’s lotus feet.”

There were seven wealthy scholars present, and to them the sannyāsī gave charge: “Each day, one among you shall provide the complete materials for worship.” None could refuse the Master’s word. All the brāhmaṇas of Vārāṇasī were devoted to him. Then, with full ceremonial honor, the text was placed in the howdah. Gathering in great numbers, the people began a grand procession. Flags fluttered in the breeze, cymbals and mṛdaṅgas sounded sweetly, and the Vaiṣṇavas sang with loving fervor, crying the holy Name in triumph. Drums, trumpets, and kettledrums resounded; the very sky seemed filled with sound. Men and women crowded to behold the sight. Thus they moved on until nightfall, releasing at intervals streams of light from flares and fireworks, like rivers of flame—pipes, moonlike lamps, and other devices brightened the way. Handfuls of flowers and fragrant powders were showered upon the procession.

In Kāśī itself, this great festival was displayed. Wherever the procession halted, the scholars performed the ritual service. The sannyāsīs and brāhmaṇas were all fed together, and countless others besides. For seven days the celebration continued, the text being borne in procession day and night, its glories proclaimed in honor of Śrīnātha.

On the eighth day they returned to the original place, and there too the festival was held with great joy. Then the sannyāsī commanded the learned brāhmaṇas, “Come together, and let us hear from Śrīnātha himself a sacred discourse, rich with love.”

Hearing this, joy spread among all. A grand assembly was arranged, wherein the kīrtana would be heard. Learned scholars, Vaiṣṇava devotees, Vedic brāhmaṇas, saints, elders, men, and women of devotion—all gathered in the monastery hall. With the sound of cymbals, mṛdaṅgas, and vīṇās, the music rose like the very vibration of Brahman.

When Eknātha began the kīrtana, the delight in his heart was boundless. As the name of Viṭṭhala was shouted, hands clapped in rhythm, and the sound filled the sky with victory-cries. Narrating the lives of great devotees, he intertwined spiritual wisdom with the glories of bhakti, declaring that in this age of Kali the Holy Name is indeed the sure deliverer. He cited the Bhāgavata and the words of the Sadguru to exalt the power of devotion.

Listening to the gracious words of Śrīnātha, the assembly sat motionless, their bodies forgotten, absorbed in meditation, as if in samādhi. Brāhmaṇas conversed among themselves, many engaged in Hari-kīrtana, yet such wondrous love as was then revealed had not been seen by any.

His kīrtana blended spiritual knowledge with poetic beauty, deepening the listeners’ absorption. Men and women alike blessed his parents for bringing forth such a soul. For four days the kīrtana festival went on, and on the fifth was held the Gopāla-kalā, manifesting the mood of Śrī Hari’s divine sports and distributing prasāda to all.

The foremost brāhmaṇas of Kāśī, young and old, rich and poor, declared everywhere, “Blessed, blessed! This is verily the descent of the Lord Himself.” The sannyāsīs said in that moment, “We have seen with our own eyes the very līlās of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and his dear devotee, Eknath. Blessed indeed is this day’s celebration.”

The venerable yati addressed all the assembled scholars, saying, “The Ekādasha Skandha of the Bhāgavata, as composed by Eknātha, must be copied in its entirety by your own hands. You should all come together to accomplish this task.” Upon his insistence, they immediately began—each taking one chapter to write.

At that very moment, the Master commenced with the episode of Rukmiṇī’s svayaṃvara. Seated upon the bank of the Maṇikarṇikā, he fixed his mind with perfect concentration, and on the sacred day of Rāma-jayantī, he completed the entire text as had been resolved. Soon a full manuscript of the Ekādasha Skandha was ready, prepared by the scholars and brought before the Master, who, with love, kept it in the monastery and read from it daily with devotion.

Having thus fulfilled the yati’s instructions, Eknātha made ready to return to his homeland. All the sannyāsīs and scholars came to bid him farewell. Śrīnātha, out of affection for the residents of the holy place, offered them full prostrations, and they, embracing him in turn, met him with heartfelt love.

After bidding farewell, the townspeople escorted him to the city’s edge. Day and night they cherished in their minds the virtues of the Master.

Meanwhile, as Eknātha journeyed, his heart was continually filled with inner joy. Along the way, by divine arrangement, he happened upon Dāsopanta. This saint, from his very childhood, had cherished the desire to behold Śrī Dattātreya, and with deep love he had undertaken severe disciplines to obtain that vision.

One might ask what manner of disciplines these were. Let it be told for the joy of the worthy listener. Renouncing all family ties, he had gone into the solitude of the forest, sustaining himself only on fallen leaves, utterly disregarding the needs of the body. He slept upon bare rock, enduring heat and cold alike. If by chance a man approached, he would rise and flee from sight, keeping his mind fixed in constant remembrance of Śrī Dattātreya.

Such was his steadfastness that, in time, his body wasted away, and as he rolled upon the bare stones, his limbs became wounded. For twenty full years he continued thus. Then, moved by this austerity, Dattātreya granted him direct vision. Embracing him, the Lord transformed his body into a divine form and bestowed His full grace, along with the blessing of composing poetry in abundance.

By the mercy of the Sadguru, and according to the fruit of his destiny, wealth came to him, and the great and learned honored him for his vast mind. Dāsopanta took up residence

beneath the mango tree of Āmbejogā, and the fame of Śrī Eknātha had already reached his ears through the mouths of many.

Now, returning from a great pilgrimage, Dāsopanta met Eknātha unexpectedly. Embracing each other, both felt deep delight in their hearts. Standing side by side, they spoke of the happiness of their meeting, which they declared to be the fruit of divine destiny.

With affectionate insistence, Dāsopanta led the Master, Eknath, to his own home, where waves of joy and bliss arose. He worshipped him with pure devotion, offered daily delicious meals, and, in the evenings, arranged for the recitation of the Bhāgavata and the singing of Hari's kīrtana, which drew eager listeners.

After a month had passed, Eknātha sought permission to depart. Dāsopanta, with earnest pleading, offered him a horse and expenses for the road, but Śrīnātha, being ever content and free from desire, declined to accept any wealth or possessions. "The path is difficult," they said, yet he refused even the horse.

Then Dāsopanta spoke: "The festival of Kṛṣṇa-jayantī is about to be celebrated in my home. If you would graciously spare the time, come swiftly to the city of Pratiṣṭhāna for this occasion." Eknātha readily agreed, and after exchanging respectful salutations, he set forth and soon arrived at Pratiṣṭhāna.

As the city drew near, the news reached Uddhava, who rejoiced as one rejoices at the sight of rain after a long drought. With flags and banners, cymbals, vīṇās, and mṛdaṅgas, with bunches of tulasī and garlands of flowers, he hastened to welcome the Master.

The men and women of the holy city, loving devotees of Viṭṭhala, sang and danced as they came to meet him. The moment their eyes beheld Śrīnātha's form, all were filled with joy. Crying the name of Viṭṭhala, some fell to the ground in prostration. Overcome with love, they placed their heads upon his feet. The Master embraced them all, but the love in their hearts could not be contained.

Uddhava himself carried bunches of tulasī and adorned him with flower garlands. "Blessed is this day," the Vaiṣṇava servants of the Lord sang, "for we have met him whom we longed to see."

Thus, singing the Lord's virtues and dancing in joy, Śrīnātha entered the city, the auspicious music resounding so loudly that the sky itself seemed to echo. Fists full of flowers were flung into the air. In this way he entered the home, and there, before his eyes, he beheld the deity of Pāṇḍuraṅga.

Prostrating fully before the Lord, he then performed the auspicious ārati to Rukmiṇī and waved the sacred lamp before her. To all assembled he distributed the Lord's prasāda, delighting their hearts. He inquired lovingly after everyone's welfare, and, seating himself, conversed with them at ease.

When four hours of the night had passed, the people dispersed to their homes. Girijābāī, with her own hands, served the Master refreshments. After performing kīrtana, they retired for the night. Soon the day of Kṛṣṇa-jayantī dawned, and Uddhava, according to proper custom, began the preparations.

Within the home, all the materials for the offering to the saints were made ready in abundance. The walls, both inside and out, were freshly plastered and adorned with painted designs.

On the day of the full moon, when the festivities were in full splendour, Śrī Dāsopant suddenly arrived, unannounced, at the great gates. Śrī Eknātha himself had not received any prior word of this visit. At that moment, a wondrous sight appeared before all—the venerable Śrī Dattātreya stood guard at the gateway, holding a trident in His hand, in the guise of a steadfast doorkeeper.

When Dāsopant beheld this marvellous vision with his own eyes, he was filled with astonishment. Without a moment's delay, he leapt down from his palanquin and prostrated himself fully upon the ground in deep reverence. Śrī Datta, embracing him with divine affection, inquired the purpose of his coming. To this, the son of Anasūyā, in his majestic voice, replied: "Eknātha is no mere humble devotee, descended in this age of Kali on the order of Lord Panduranga with the certain resolve to uplift the world. Only those who, through the merit of past births, are destined by Divine Will may gain the fortune of serving him; such a soul must be recognised by his deep devotion."

Śrī Datta continued, "Here I stand, trident in hand, firmly guarding the gate. I have already conveyed my word to the Master that none should enter within without my knowledge." Hearing these words, the Avadhūta Dāsopant stood amazed in heart, saying, "I do not fully comprehend the boundless glory of Śrī Nātha."

Śrī Datta then informed Eknātha that Dāsopant had come for his darśan. Immediately, Eknātha came forth, accompanied by Uddhava, and greeted the saint with heartfelt reverence. They clasped each other's feet, exchanged loving embraces, and, holding Dāsopant by the hand, Eknātha led him with delight into his home. His palanquin, horse, and attendants were all duly accommodated, and no lack was felt in any provision for his comfort.

As in the days when Śrī Kṛṣṇa, in his divine incarnation, cherished Uddhava, so too did Eknātha's heart overflow with love for Dāsopant. There was no selfish motive in this service; it was the fulfilment of a sacred bond from former births. No trace of personal attachment clouded his mind—it was service to the saint that filled his heart entirely.

Dāsopant was given the honour of bathing and was then seated for the meal alongside Eknātha. That night, listening to the sweet chanting of the Lord's glories, the hours passed unnoticed until the dawn light touched the horizon. The deity of Pāṇḍuraṅga was bathed and anointed; various offerings were made with deep devotion, and the Lord was

worshipped with tender love. Auspicious music resounded at the threshold, the ārati was sung, the brāhmaṇas recited the Vedas, and fragrant flowers were offered at the Lord's feet.

By day, the brāhmaṇas were duly fed; by night, the kīrtan of the Lord continued. From the first day of the bright fortnight until Navarātri, the joy of the festival knew no bounds. On Daśamī, the playful gopāla-kāla was performed with full ceremony. Dāsopant's heart was filled with bliss at this vision. He beheld Eknātha's eloquent speech, his poetic compositions, and his profound knowledge of spiritual truth, and marvelled at their unmatched excellence.

Inwardly, Dāsopant thought, "I am indeed a worshipper of Śrī Datta, blessed with divine vision; yet, gazing upon the majesty of Nātha, my heart becomes utterly absorbed and still."

When the festival reached its climax, on Dvādaśī the ceremonial conclusion was swiftly performed. Seeking permission, Dāsopant then returned peacefully to his own place. Truly, saints such as he grant liberation to the devout, yet for the faithless and the hostile, their very enmity leads them into downfall.

The life and deeds of Śrī Eknātha cannot be compared to ordinary tales. Even those who harboured ill-will or ignorance towards him were often uplifted by his compassion, for he was in truth a great world-teacher. In Vārāṇasī, certain ascetics and scholars once sought to trouble him, yet by revealing a divine wonder he turned their hearts to devotion in a single moment.

Learning and humility resided in him in equal measure, and compassion for all beings was his unfathomable nature. His kindness towards every living creature was boundless, and his reverence for the brāhmaṇas was deep and unshaken. This service, in truth, was the sacred debt he bore as Śrī Kṛṣṇanātha.

At times, taking the form of a brāhmaṇa, the wielder of the discus himself would carry water from the Godavari in a kāvaḍ for the saint's worship. Who could comprehend the strange workings of such divine acts? Their fruits are known only to the Lord Himself.

Many such sweet and profound incidents adorn his life. Once, after bathing in the Godavari, Eknātha was returning towards his home. At the entrance of the town, there sat a certain arrogant Yavana, who suddenly spat upon the ground. At that very instant, Nātha happened to be walking along the same path, and the spittle fell upon his person. Yet not even the smallest trace of anger arose in Eknātha's heart, nor did the least shadow of hurt disturb his inner peace.

Just as the earth abides in perfect forbearance, so too were the signs of the blessed Śrīnāth. Some people worship the very ground, yet upon it they also cast filth and refuse; the earth, taking pleasure and pain alike in its inmost being, does not forsake its nature, but remains free of greed and anger towards any. In the same manner, upon Eknath (Śrīnāth), the person of the Lord, an ignorant man once spat without knowing whom he affronted. Śrīnāth's heart was not scorched with wrath; instead, an exceeding compassion welled forth within him. He

thought, “This man has indeed committed a fault, and without doubt he will fall into ruin. Now, if only repentance may arise in his heart, a way of remedy must be devised.”

Thus resolving in his mind, he went to bathe in the Godavari. Afterwards he returned home, performed the worship of Lord Viṣṇu, offered the food and the Vaiśvadeva oblation, and served the twice-born assembled in proper order. Then, setting apart two portions of that sanctified food, he carried them to the dwelling of the very man who had spat upon him. With gracious courtesy he saluted him and said, “Partake of this prasāda for the sake of my affection.”

When the man lifted the lid of the vessel, he beheld with astonishment the divine food within. The Yavana was pierced with remorse, remembering the injustice he had done. He said, “I am a madman and the vilest of men, a despiser of Brāhmaṇas and the lowest of the low. This morning I spat upon you without a single thought. You are a holy man, honoured by all in this city. Forgive me, O noble one.” Saying so, he fell prostrate at Śrīnāth’s feet. Śrīnāth raised him up with love, embracing him, and said, “If, upon seeing me, you had vomited, even then the blame would have been mine; how much less when, without knowing, you committed this fault! Now that repentance has arisen in your heart, there is no greater expiation than this. In my eyes you are wholly free of blame.” Having thus consoled him, Eknath took his leave.

On another day, when midday had come, Ekanāth went to the Godavari for his daily rites. Having completed the Brahma-yajna, he was hastening homeward. The month was Vaiśākha, the heat fierce, and the sands of the riverbank were burning to the touch. There, in the midst of the scorching waste, a child was crying out in great distress. As soon as Ekanāth beheld him, compassion melted his heart. “In a moment,” he thought, “the breath of life will leave this one.” At once he lifted the child into his arms, wiped him with the cloth upon his shoulder, and sought to comfort him. “Tell me quickly, where is your home?” he asked. The little one could not speak, but pointed with his hand the way.

When they reached a small hut, the child’s mother came into view, and the little one cried out to her. Ekanāth understood within himself, “This is the son of a Mahāriṇī.” Setting the child down, he let it run to its mother, and then he returned to the Godavari for a full bath. Drying his garments and marking his brow with the sign of Dvārakā, he came home and took his meal in peace. No one in the sacred precincts knew that the child seated upon his shoulder had been of an untouchable’s house.

But the will of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga was set that Ekanāth’s fame should shine forth, and so the Lord fashioned a wondrous design. In the town there lived a wise Brāhmaṇa afflicted with leprosy. By the weight of grievous sin a dreadful disease had seized his body, and in repentance he had undertaken a vow at Tryambakeśvara to restore his health. For twelve years he had renounced all grains, subsisting only on roots and fruits, and had observed his

austerities without fail. One night, the Lord of Tryambaka appeared to him in a dream and said, “Go swiftly now to Pratiṣṭhāna, to the banks of the Godāvarī. There dwells my devotee Ekanāth, ever intent upon serving the Brāhmaṇas and full of compassion for all beings. Once he carried upon his shoulder the child of a low-born woman and restored it to its mother. If he will give you the merit of that deed, you will be healed at once.”

The Brāhmaṇa awoke in wonder and came to Pratiṣṭhāna, asking the townsfolk where Ekanāth might be found. At that time, Ekanāth was bathing in the Gaṅgā, and the people pointed him out. Entering the water, the Brāhmaṇa told the whole vision and said, “The merit of carrying that child rests with you. If you will bestow it upon me, I shall be freed from my disease.” Smiling, Ekanāth replied, “Whatever merit I have gathered throughout my life, I give it to you.” The Brāhmaṇa protested, “Such power is not mine; I only seek that which Tryambakeśvara commanded.” Then Ekanāth, taking water in his hands, solemnly gave the fruit of that one deed. At once the leprosy vanished, and his body became whole and beautiful. All who stood there beheld it and bowed down to the saint. The citizens marvelled, saying one to another, “Such is the unmeasured way of the Master, who turns even the sins of others into virtue.”

On yet another day, the loving devotees, together with Uddhava, entreated Ekanāth, saying, “Master, the Eleventh Skandha of the Bhāgavata was rendered into the common language by your divine self; we desire to hear it from your own lips.” Seeing the longing in their hearts, Ekanāth assented. Choosing an auspicious day, he began the recitation. The pious and tender-hearted people of the holy place gathered in full. In the third watch of the day the reading would commence, and from his mouth the words flowed in unfailing sweetness, while the hearers became absorbed in the sacred tale. Then there occurred yet another wondrous marvel, worthy of being heard with the devotion and discernment of the faithful. The holy Godavari, assuming the charming form of a beautiful woman, came swiftly to the place. Her grace and loveliness were beyond compare—her form slender and delicate like a tender creeper, adorned with fine garments and shining ornaments. In all that sacred assembly there was no maiden of such beauty to be found. In this enchanting form, that divine daughter of Lord Viṣṇu came and sat directly before Śrīnātha. Many women were present there, yet none could match her in radiance. As she listened to the nectarine words from the Lord’s lips, her gaze remained fixed upon Him, her heart wholly absorbed in devotion. In that moment she gave no space for her mind to wander, and all consciousness of the body was forgotten.

When the secret doctrines of bhakti were spoken, an intense love would well up in her heart. Tears of joy would stream from her eyes, witnessed by all who were present. Yet among the listeners, there were some of perverse mind whose thoughts strayed. They wondered to themselves: “Who is this beautiful lady? From where has she come? We have never seen her before in this holy city of Pratiṣṭhāna. And yet she comes unfailingly, at the appointed hour, with steadfast devotion.”

She would not sit among the general company of women, but took her seat apart. Her bearing was of one blessed with all auspicious marks, her age that of youthful bloom, yet she spoke to no one. Her gaze remained ever upon the Lord, her mind fixed in pure love. But the crooked-minded entertained idle conjectures, and their whisperings began to spread in the town. "What a wondrously beautiful woman!" they said. "We must behold her with our own eyes!" Thus, under the pretext of listening to the holy discourse, others too began to gather out of curiosity.

In this manner many days passed, until at last the reading of the Purāṇa drew near its conclusion. Then, the corrupt-minded among the listeners thought within themselves: "Once the scripture ends, we must follow her at once, to learn where she dwells. Is she the mistress of her own household? Does she live in her husband's home? Or is she visiting her mother's family? Without asking her, we will go and find out."

While these unwholesome resolves were being made, the recitation reached its conclusion. With loving reverence, Godavari bowed before Eknath and, filling her mind with His divine form, rose swiftly to depart. The curious followed behind at a distance, exchanging glances with one another. She walked ahead, they following after, eager to discover her secret. Then the virtuous daughter of Viṣṇu came happily to the bank of the Godavari. Stepping into the holy waters up to her knees, she stood still for but a moment. With her own hands she performed ācamana, sipping the sacred water. And then—at once—she vanished from sight.

Just as a flash of lightning appears among the massed clouds and then disappears in an instant, so did she reveal her brilliance and then become invisible. The crooked-minded realised, with awe, what had occurred. "This is none other than Godavari herself, who flows to meet the ocean," they thought. "She has taken human form to hear the Bhāgavata."

In that instant, they were overcome with shame. "We, of dull understanding, have defiled our own hearts with idle suspicion. This was the very form of Lord Viṣṇu's Tirtha, Godavari. We should never have regarded her as a mortal woman. Just as a fool, seeing nectar in a golden vessel, mistakes it for intoxicating liquor, so have we been deceived by our own corrupted vision."

Filled with remorse, they bathed, performed their evening prayers, and returned home with minds bewildered.

The next day, in the third quarter of the day, they came again to the Lord's house for the recitation. Bowing before Him, they seated themselves upon the āsana. The Swāmī, setting aside His book, waited a moment and remarked: "It seems some among our listeners have not arrived; there is great delay today."

Then those who had harboured suspicion approached the Eknath's feet and, in repentance, told the whole story. "That most beautiful maiden, the very river of beauty itself, came here daily to hear the holy words. But we entertained unworthy doubts in our hearts and followed behind her. Then, before our eyes, she entered the Godavari and vanished! We are now

certain it was Godavari Devī Herself. Alas, we are of perverse mind and poor fortune; thus we fell into such error. We have committed a great offence—may you forgive us!"

Śrīnātha, filled with joy, replied: "Indeed, great is your merit, for you have beheld the Goddess Godavari in person. By that vision, all your sins have been destroyed. Now hold no doubt within your hearts—listen with full faith to the Bhāgavata. Your merit is great indeed, for you have seen a most wondrous divine sport."

Thus instructing them, the Eknath recommenced the Purāṇa recitation, and the joy of all present was boundless. For the one whose recitation draws even Godavari Herself to listen, his fame is spread upon the earth and inscribed with love in the hearts of kings.

Here ends this charming and blissful twenty-second chapter of the Śrī Bhakta Līlāmṛta, in which the mere hearing fulfils the deepest desires of the Vaiṣṇava devotee.

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Chapter 23

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ.

In the sacred invocation of Lord Gaṇeśa's name, the blessed narrative begins, for when one listens attentively to the holy lives of saints, the very hearing becomes a purifying stream, dissolving the gravest of sins. Fortunate indeed are those liberated souls who, with one-pointed attention, seat themselves to listen. When the true stories of God's dear devotees are heard with sincerity, immense spiritual merit accrues. Such merit does not fade even after experiencing countless enjoyments, nor is it lost even at the end of an age.

The performance of rites, austerities, and vows surely yields merit; yet, the joy derived from them is fleeting, vanishing in but a moment. But when one listens with delight to the divine narration of the Bhāgavata, that merit is eternal, never exhausted. In the end, such a listener attains union with the Supreme. If one harbours a deep love for the saints' stories and listens with cupped ears, even if that person were to fall into dire calamity, the Supreme Lord of all worlds Himself will come to their rescue.

In the previous chapter, you heard how the sacred Bhāgavata was recited to a woman, the Gaṅgā herself having taken human form to listen. Even men who were hostile in mind were shown divine wonders; their hearts melted in repentance, and they offered obeisance to Śrī Eknātha.

Now, hear of another episode. There was once a man living near Śrī Eknātha who was utterly devoid of piety and given to improper conduct. He never visited the saint's home, never attended the Purāṇa readings, nor listened to the kīrtana of Lord Hari. Though he dwelt in the presence of the Gaṅgā, he bathed in hot water, ignoring her sacred stream. He performed no daily bath, no twilight prayers, no offerings to ancestors. Twice a day he ate his meals, and merely provided for his household.

Seeing this neighbour, Śrī Eknātha felt great compassion: "This man has been blessed with a human body, yet it will be wasted in downfall. Since he has come to live near us, perhaps some noble resolve may arise in his heart. I must find a way, without delay, to awaken spiritual interest in him." With this thought, the saint, while on his way, approached the man, greeted him with folded hands, and spoke.

The neighbour stopped for a moment to return the greeting. Śrī Eknātha inquired kindly about his family and livelihood, and how he sustained his household. The man replied, "I live here with my wife and children, serving in a certain employment. My master pays me wages with which I pass my days." Hearing this, Śrī Eknātha said, "I have one request of you."

The man, blinded by worldly attachment and inwardly fearful, gave no reply. Perceiving his mind, the saint reassured him: "I do not seek wealth from you. Only grant me a little of your time—come to my home for kīrtana." The man answered, "I have no free time due to

household duties." Śrī Eknātha then said, "Very well. From the thousand names of Lord Viṣṇu, I shall teach you just one verse. Learn it with care, and you will have accomplished a great task."

Hearing these words, the man felt a touch of awe. The saint wrote the verse on a leaf and had him read it aloud. As he read, Śrī Eknātha gently caressed his back with lotus-like hands, and in that moment the man's mind began to change. He memorised the verse, and on the next day came to learn another. Thus, in due course, he committed the entire Viṣṇu Sahasranāma to memory.

Then Śrī Eknātha instructed, "From now on, resolve to bathe, sit on your seat, and meditate with one-pointed mind while reciting the thousand names. Speak to no one during the recitation." The man agreed and practised as told. His understanding deepened; he began visiting the temple, bowing at the saint's feet before attending to his daily affairs.

As time passed, the man fell ill with a high fever. His life neared its end, and the messengers of Yama came to seize him. His speech had already failed, so his family prepared rites of atonement. But as water was poured over him for the ritual bath, the remembrance of the Sahasranāma welled up in his mind, and he began to recite it with force and devotion. All present were overjoyed, exclaiming that his unseen fortune was great indeed. Hearing the sound of divine remembrance, the messengers of Yama fled, while the messengers of Lord Viṣṇu arrived, honoured him, and took him to the eternal realm of Vaikuṇṭha.

Had Śrī Eknātha not bestowed his grace, this man would surely have gone to ruin. Therefore, in this dark age of Kali, saints take birth for the very purpose of uplifting souls. Those who live near a saint often come to realise the Supreme directly. The dwellers of holy places say among themselves, "The saint is none other than the Lord's dear servant, appearing in human guise to reveal His incomparable grace."

Through gentle persuasion and firm teaching, Śrī Eknātha drew many to the path of devotion, cutting through all false doctrines and greatly exalting the glory of the Divine Name. In this same blessed land lived Girijābāī, who first gave birth to a precious daughter named Godubāī. Later, a son was born to her, and they named him Harināma. When he grew, he was invested with the sacred thread and sent to study in a Brahmin school.

After him was born a daughter named Gaṅgābāī. Godubāī, the elder daughter, was given in marriage to a certain Chinto-pant, a householder of the sacred town of Pratiṣṭhāna. Gaṅgābāī was married into an old family in the Karnāṭaka country, and her wedding was arranged without delay.

To Gaṅgābāī was born a son, named Puṇḍājī, who from his youth delighted in the worship of Lord Viṣṇu, offering it with sincere love from his heart. As for Śrī Eknātha's own son, his name was Hari, and his intellect was of remarkable brilliance. He mastered all branches of knowledge and became proficient in the six systems of philosophy, earning the respect of senior Brāhmaṇas, who fondly called him "Hari Paṇḍit." The foremost scholars of Pratiṣṭhāna

often praised him, saying, “If the father is like a touchstone, the son is pure gold—his wisdom is truly great.”

Śrī Eknātha, a saintly soul, would sing the glories of the Lord in the language of the common people, and women and men of all castes would listen, becoming deeply absorbed. By bringing the sacred Purāṇas into the people’s own language, he revived a tradition that had been forgotten, as Sanskrit texts had long remained inaccessible to many. Even as common clay is transformed into gold by the touch of a master craftsman, so was Hari Paṇḍit a jewel surpassing even his father. Like a precious diamond drawn forth from a mere stone, he shone as a rare gem in the depths of their lineage.

Though the ocean may be vast, its water is often salty; yet, from it the moon rises, shedding nectar-like drops. In the same way, from the womb of Śrī Eknātha came forth the precious jewel Hari Paṇḍit—a learned Brāhmaṇa of flawless character, fully accomplished in the six śāstras.

Yet, while the learned elders honoured the son, they would at times speak ill of the father, praising the son all the more. This stirred in Hari Paṇḍit a subtle pride in his learning, and the company of such critics further tainted his mind. “Why should I listen to such talk?” he would think, yet he often repeated to himself: “I am a master of the six philosophies, while my father sings in the common language. As a respected Brāhmaṇa of a sacred town, I feel ashamed of this.” Thus, his pride grew until he resolved, “I shall give up my home and go to dwell in Kāśī.”

Hari Paṇḍit had three sons; taking two of them and his wife, he departed for the holy city of Kāśī. The youngest son, Rāghobā, remained with Śrī Eknātha, bound to him by deep affection. This child bore no resentment for being left behind; day and night he remained happily near his grandparents, eager to serve them in small ways. When Śrī Eknātha performed kīrtana, the boy would take the small cymbals in his hands and sing with innocent joy, astonishing all who saw him. He could act out the playful līlās of Kṛṣṇa, recite his grandfather’s teachings by heart, and, when alone with the saint, would bow humbly at his feet, receiving blessings from so young an age. People, seeing his virtues, would say, “Surely he will inherit the full greatness of Śrī Eknātha. He is fit to uphold this sacred seat.”

Meanwhile, in Kāśī, Hari Paṇḍit, as a learned speaker and Brāhmaṇa, soon received much wealth. He built a fine mansion in that holiest of cities and settled there with his family. Back in Pratiṣṭhāna, Śrī Eknātha continued his daily kīrtanas in praise of Śrī Hari, guiding all the devotees to worship the Lord in unison and obey the saint’s commands.

One day, sitting alone, the saint reflected, “The people of this sacred place are absorbed in Kṛṣṇa’s worship. But my own son remains bound by pride in his ritualism. It is like darkness beneath a lamp—my own household has been thus shadowed. I must go to him myself, bring him back here, and complete my work in this life. Just as ice, floating in water, remains

cold and unmelted, so his heart remains untouched by the warmth of devotion. I must perform some miracle to turn him toward bhakti."

With this firm resolve, Śrī Eknātha journeyed to Kāśī. After bathing at Maṇikarṇikā, he went to take darśana of Viśveśvara and then proceeded towards his son's house. When Hari Paṇḍit came forward and bowed before him, father and son met with deep affection. Seating his father with due honour, Hari Paṇḍit performed all the formalities of hospitality and enquired after his well-being before serving him a meal. Thus, Śrī Eknātha was satisfied.

For some days, he remained there, and in that time, the son faithfully served him. The people recalled an earlier incident when Hari Paṇḍit had been instructed by the mahants and renunciants of the monasteries: "By Śrī Eknātha's command, you must live always in the path of righteousness. He is not a mere man, but an dear devotee of Lord Viṣṇu. Though we once misunderstood and opposed him greatly, we have now realised that his divine līlās are without limit."

Hearing such words, Hari Paṇḍit would say, "How can I act apart from my father's will?" And saying thus, he would return promptly to his own house.

For many days, time passed quietly. One day Śrīnath spoke to his only son in seclusion, saying, "My age has now reached its full measure, and the time for my departure is drawing near. The span of life that remains, I wish to spend in your company. Without you beside me, my heart finds no peace, and the thought causes me sorrow. You are my only true son, the sole heir to my lineage. If you now come with me to Pratiṣṭhāna, our honour and repute will grow greatly.

I have built a fine residence in that holy place, and I would keep both my sons there, so that the sacred foundation may be maintained in full propriety. You must oversee it always."

Hearing these words, Hari Paṇḍit replied with folded hands, "Master, I have but one request to make, though it may not be pleasing to you. If you agree to it, I shall gladly accompany you. You must never partake of food cooked by others, and you must not read the Purāṇas in the common language. If you can accept these two conditions, then I shall come with you."

Śrīnath, filling his words with affection, made no insistence of his own. "As you wish," he said gently, "so shall I act without fail." Thus, giving his solemn word to his own son, he brought contentment to his heart, and the two set out together, bound by deep mutual love.

At their own pace, they travelled along the road until they reached the sacred city of Pratiṣṭhāna. Great joy spread among the people, who came eagerly to meet them face to face. To the devotees, Śrīnath's arrival was like the festival of Dīpāvalī; they offered their salutations and greeted him with warmth and delight.

Entering his own residence, Śrīnath felt the eager devotion of the people, for they longed that there might be kīrtana that very day. But he sat in quiet repose. On the next day, Hari

Paṇḍit began to expound the Purāṇas in Sanskrit. Many devout and learned listeners gathered, and the recitation began that morning. Śrīnath, seated at ease, listened with heartfelt love.

Yet, the real desire of all was to hear the sacred words from Śrīnath's own lips. However, Hari Paṇḍit, keeping to his resolve, set aside the vernacular kīrtana and introduced Sanskrit Purāṇas instead. It also became known in the town that Śrīnath would no longer partake of food cooked by others.

But in the hearts of the common devotees, a deep concern arose. They said, "Our earlier good fortune is broken; the familiar kīrtana in our tongue has ceased, and now only Sanskrit is spoken." For the women, the Śūdras, and people of other castes, the meaning could not be grasped, and when the Purāṇa was read, they would quietly depart, unable to follow. Thus, one daily observance that once nourished them was lost.

When Śrīnath himself would recite the Purāṇas, the courtyard would be filled to overflowing; only ten or fifteen seats remained empty, and the place would be abuzz with joy. He knew the hearts of all and understood that a great distance had come between the people and their devotion.

It was at such a time that another incident took place, which all devotees should hear. In Pratiṣṭhāna there lived a wealthy brāhmaṇa. His wife had once made a solemn vow to Goddess Rukmiṇī: "If Thou dost bless me with the Lord of the universe as my son, I shall offer a feast to a thousand brāhmaṇas." By the Lord's grace, the boon was granted, but through the strange turn of destiny, their wealth was later lost. Her husband too passed away, and poverty overtook her completely.

To preserve her life, she would daily seek alms of food and clothing. She would go from house to house, offering water and receiving in return a few small coins. In this manner, she passed her days in Pratiṣṭhāna, coming regularly to Śrīnath's house to listen to the Purāṇa.

One day she confided to a wise and devout brāhmaṇa: "Long ago I made a vow, that if blessed with the Lord, I would feed a thousand brāhmaṇas. But my fate turned, all my wealth was swept away, and in the end widowhood befell me. Now even food and clothing are uncertain. I pass my days going door to door, yet I constantly remember the debt I owe to the Lord. How shall that vow ever be fulfilled?"

Hearing her words, the brāhmaṇa replied, "If you serve even one brāhmaṇa who is firmly established in Brahman, your merit will be boundless. If one is not learned in the Vedas but has merely mastered the Gāyatrī mantra, then feeding a hundred such is equal to feeding one true Vedic scholar. If one has studied the threefold Vedic canon, then feeding a hundred such is equal to feeding a single astrologer learned in the meaning of the Vedas. And one who is established in Vedāntic wisdom is a hundred times greater than that. If a person truly acts according to such knowledge, then merely beholding him removes all sin."

It is said that a single act of worship performed by one who has conquered the senses is worth a hundredfold more than ordinary devotion. Such a one, steadfast in the disciplines of self-control and inner tranquillity, remains ever pure in thought and deed. Among hundreds of such sense-conquerors who live meritorious lives, if even one is a devotee of Lord Viṣṇu, free from envy and untouched by hatred, his greatness is beyond measure. To him, friend and foe appear alike, for in all he beholds the very form of Lord Janārdana.

Indeed, to feed even such a one is to have fed a hundred thousand brāhmaṇas. Thus it is told that if a meal is offered to the saintly Eknātha, it is as if an immense multitude has been fed and satisfied.

When such was spoken, the hearts of the householders were filled with love, and a certain brāhmaṇī felt deep joy within. Returning to her humble dwelling, she resolved with unwavering mind to bring Eknātha into her home and serve him with a meal prepared with her own hands. She desired to offer him delicacies in many varieties, keeping this intent close within her heart.

But her circumstances were poor. She was but a frail brāhmaṇī, living with her husband in a house devoid of wealth or grain. Yet her resolve was firm. Each day she earned a little by carrying water for others, and whatever small amount she received, she faithfully saved. Bit by bit she gathered wheat, rice, lentils, and ghee, storing them in her house. She herself prepared vadas, papads, and rolled many small sweet confections. She brought together greens, leaves, jaggery, and other provisions, gathering all with devotion.

When everything was ready, she set out with her husband to extend the invitation. At that time, Hari Paṇḍit was seated listening to the Purāṇas in the company of Śrīnātha. They waited quietly until the sacred recital came to its close. Then, as Hari Paṇḍit rose to return home, the householder approached with his wife and offered his request to Śrīnātha, saying, “It is said that when you partake even a handful of food, a hundred thousand brāhmaṇas are fed. Thus we have made ready all arrangements, and humbly invite you to grace our home.”

Hearing the sincerity behind these words, Śrīnātha instructed them, “Go to the temple and seek Hari Paṇḍit’s consent.” The couple, feeling both hope and nervousness, went at once to his house and conveyed the entire matter.

But upon hearing it, Hari Paṇḍit, stirred by anger, rebuked the brāhmaṇī at once. “We have undertaken the great pilgrimage vow,” he said, “and have entirely renounced food cooked by others.”

These harsh words pierced her heart, and she felt a deep sense of despair. She returned to Śrīnātha, stood before him with folded hands, her eyes brimming with tears. Her throat choked with emotion, she spoke little, yet her silent grief moved the saint. Seeing her distress, Śrīnātha, filled with compassion, resolved to fulfil her cherished wish.

He went at once to his son and said, “Go quickly and prepare the meal yourself. We shall both dine there; this will suffice to fulfil the longing of this aged, destitute brāhmaṇī, who is without any protector. You have given your word to me, and now you must keep it, so that her vow may be completed.”

Hari Paṇḍit, though hesitant, bowed to his father’s will and said, “In obedience to your desire, I will go.” Śrīnātha then went to the brāhmaṇī and asked gently, “Tell me, you have prepared vadas and papads with your own hands for months; would you have all that effort go to waste?”

She replied earnestly, “O Master, you are the very embodiment of divine play, and hunger for the love of your devotees. My only thought now is that my wish may be fulfilled; kindly tell me how that may be so.”

Pleased with her devotion, Śrīnātha said, “Cook with your own hands the vadas you have lovingly made. After we have offered the fivefold oblation to the Lord, you may then serve us your prepared meal.” Hearing these sweet words was like tasting nectar to her heart.

Eknātha further assured her, “Whatever you serve with love will be sweet to us; we have no other preference.” Overjoyed, she returned home and carefully set aside the prepared branches and leaves for the next day.

At dawn she rose, swept and sprinkled the courtyard, washed the vessels, and went to bathe in the holy Gaṅgā. She fetched water and stored it, then shut her door and hastened to Śrīnātha’s house. Bowing to Hari Paṇḍit, she said, “All the ingredients are ready. Now, please come and fulfil my heart’s desire.”

Śrīnātha instructed his son once more, “You must prepare the cooking yourself; we shall come together soon after.” Then Hari Paṇḍit went swiftly with her, bathed, and began to cook with care. Whatever dish he himself knew how to prepare, she supplied the ingredients with her own loving hands, bringing forth everything she had gathered for this blessed day.

Having entrusted all the ingredients to Hari Paṇḍit, the brāhmaṇī herself set about the preparations for the sacred meal. Śrīnātha, perceiving the love hidden in her heart, reflected, “She has invited no one else to call me—then let me go of my own accord.” Just as once the Supreme Lord Śrīhari went unbidden to the house of Vidura, so too, at that very moment, Eknātha arrived at her humble dwelling.

She welcomed him with reverence and offered water for his bath. Meanwhile Hari Paṇḍit, having completed the Vaiśvadeva rite, served two plates with his own hands. As the fragrant ghee was poured upon the steaming food, Śrīnātha called the brāhmaṇī near, and with firm intention placed the sanctified resolve—the saṅkalpa—into her hands, naming Lord Janārdana as the true enjoyer of the meal.

Then, bringing Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga vividly to mind, he offered the food with the deep love of his heart. When the inner oblation to the five vital airs was completed, father and son sat

together to partake of the meal. The aged brāhmaṇī entered her house and began to bring forth the dishes she had so lovingly prepared.

She placed before Śrīnātha a great bowl heaped with rice, set puran-polis in generous measure, and served them with her own hands. She brought vadas fried in pure oil, rich milk-rice, and delicacies prepared with utmost care. Śrīnātha ate without hesitation or formality, with a swiftness born of love, just as Lord Rāma once partook of the berries offered by Śabarī. Seeing this divine simplicity, the brāhmaṇī's heart overflowed with joy.

But Hari Paṇḍit, watching this scene, became inflamed with anger. His eyes grew red, his brows knit tightly, and he bit his lips in vexation. The brāhmaṇī, folding her hands, stood humbly before Śrīnātha and said, "By your grace, O protector of the destitute, my cherished wish has been fulfilled."

Hari Paṇḍit muttered within himself, "This was the very thing my mind opposed—why has my father put my hands to the fire?" His eyes still bloodshot, lips pressed hard, and limbs trembling, he stood in silent agitation. Yet the truth remained—food offered by a devotee is sweet to the Lord, and love for the Lord is sweet to the devotee. None should view with crooked eyes the meeting of such mutual love.

But anger is like a mad elephant—it will not be restrained unless the goad of discrimination is applied. Remembering that to dishonour one's father is a grave sin, Hari Paṇḍit gathered his composure and continued eating for the sake of love. Thus Eknātha, immersed in the bliss of the Self, partook of the meal to his heart's content.

When the eating was done, they rinsed their mouths with Gaṅgā water. The brāhmaṇī had already laid out seats, betel leaves, and tulasī leaves with sanctified water. Śrīnātha then said to his son, "Go quickly and bring the two leaf-plates from which we have eaten."

The brāhmaṇī was alone—there was no second person in the house—yet when Hari Paṇḍit went to fetch the plates, a marvel appeared before his eyes. He lifted Śrīnātha's plate and set it upon his own, but then saw another plate beneath it. Thinking it must be the one from which the brāhmaṇī had eaten, he lifted it as well—only to find yet another beneath, identical in every way.

He continued to lift plate after plate, each the same as the last, until they numbered in the thousands. They did not diminish, and at last a deep remorse arose in his heart. He returned to Śrīnātha, bowed low with folded hands, tears welling in his eyes, and with the eightfold emotions of devotion swelling within him, he exclaimed: "Victory, victory to You, O great devotee of Lord Viṣṇu. I, foolish and bound by pride in my learning, knew not your glory. Today it is clear to me about your supreme position. Forgive my offence and show me your grace."

Śrīnātha, in his infinite compassion, comforted him: "My son, you have laboured greatly, but no more plates will appear now." Thus reassured, Hari Paṇḍit gathered up the thousand leaf-

plates and set them aside. Then he turned to the brāhmaṇī and said, “Truly, your fortune is beyond measure. To have invited Śrīnātha is to have fed a hundred thousand brāhmaṇas. Today I have witnessed this with my own eyes.”

The brāhmaṇī, overwhelmed with devotion, bowed to Eknātha and said, “By your grace, O purifier of the fallen, I have been sanctified.” Hari Paṇḍit then spoke to his father: “Though I have mastered the six śāstras, pride in that knowledge blinded me to your greatness. From now on, wherever there is pure and sincere devotion, there I shall go to partake of food, and I shall also read the sacred texts of our people.”

With that, father and son returned to their home. The brāhmaṇī, with the remnants of the sacred meal placed in a vessel, sat down to eat at once. Blessed indeed was her devotion—for where Eknātha was satisfied, even kings would gladly partake of his remnants with love.

Thus ends this sweet twenty-third chapter of the Bhakta Līlāmṛta, where the mere hearing fulfils the devotee’s heart’s desire, and the loving listener drinks the nectar of the saints’ deeds.

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Chapter 24

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (In the name of Śrī Gaṇeśa, let there be auspiciousness)

All glory to Thee, O Supreme Personality, the very embodiment of divine play, whose form is like a rain-laden cloud, radiant with auspicious qualities. O Lord of the universe, O Soul of all souls and delight of the devotees, none can fully comprehend Thy greatness.

Thou didst graciously made his dear devotee, Eknath, take birth in the family of Bhānudāsa at Pratiṣṭhāna, manifesting many wondrous pastimes, revealing Thyself through countless divine acts, and displaying marvellous miracles to humble the arrogant and to uplift the simple-hearted. Thou Thyself becamest both the Lord and the devotee, wondrously increasing the glory of the holy Name, rescuing many bound souls, whether by correcting their hostility or by fulfilling their inner longing for truth.

Thy incomparable pastimes, O Lord, are beyond the capacity of even the Master of Vaikuṇṭha to fully recount—how then can I, an insignificant creature, hope to describe them? Still, whatever words arise, I shall humbly speak and inscribe upon this sacred text. Do Thou, O Ocean of Compassion, accept these with Thy own grace alone.

Even to claim that these words are my own is, I confess, an offence unto Thee, O Lord of Paṇḍharī. For in truth, Thou alone art the true driver of the intellect; there is no other power at all. When the mind is troubled, not even a single word will arise; but it is Thou who again and again recallest Thyself to my heart, and thus the work of this narration proceeds.

By making me merely an instrument, O Beloved of Śrī, Thou art in truth spreading Thine own fame. This conviction is firmly fixed in my mind, for otherwise, I could have no thought to speak at all. Among all those who can speak, I am known as one who knows nothing—yet Thou, O Pāṇḍuraṅga, makest me an object of wonder.

Even as a mother delights in the first lisping words of her infant child, so do Thou, the Giver of liberation, take delight in my feeble speech, giving me the courage to continue. In the preceding chapter, I narrated the marvellous tale of the proud and learned Hari Paṇḍit, who once set forth to fetch sacred vessels for the worship of Śrīnātha.

After much labour, his entire being was filled with the spirit of righteousness, and he humbly prostrated himself before the Lord. Folding his hands, he confessed, “You are verily the great devotee of Lord Viṣṇu. Wherever pure devotion is found, there, O Master, should You accept the offering of food.”

He further prayed that the Lord might, in His own way, expound the true meanings of scripture, and he began to read sacred works daily, placing them at the lotus feet of Śrīnātha. Thus, after bidding farewell to his son, the Lord swiftly returned to His own abode, keeping the incident hidden from all others.

Later, the brāhmaṇa's wife partook of the food in her own home, and the used vessels of the offering were placed upon her head with reverence, to be carried to the banks of Godavari. There, among the people of Pratiṣṭhāna, the story was told, and as the vessels were set afloat upon the sacred stream, the hearts of the devotees were filled with great joy.

They began to say amongst themselves, "This will become a new Purāṇa of the Lord! How blessed will be the day when we may hear kīrtana upon this subject!" Word spread swiftly throughout the town, and all recognised that Hari Paṇḍit had now become a true servant of his spiritual father.

With single-minded attention, the devotees gathered to hear the Purāṇa from the very lips of Śrīnātha. The assembly overflowed with eager listeners, and the chanting of Hari's glories resounded everywhere. Hands clapped in rhythm, joy filled the hearts of the devotees, and tears welled in the lotus-eyes of Haribā.

The sound of the mṛdaṅga, together with the ringing of cymbals, seemed to merge into the very vibration of the cosmic sound, and the greatness of the Divine Name was expounded in such a way that the mere hearing of it filled the mind with bliss.

Hari Paṇḍit thought to himself, "Once, in my youth at Paiṭhaṇ, I had little understanding of these sacred tales; but today, by the Lord's grace, the truth has dawned upon me. In my pride of learning, I failed to recognise Śrīnātha's majesty, yet this Jagadguru brought me to live humbly at Kāśīpur."

Even as Arjuna, in the Dvāpara age, called Śrī Kṛṣṇa his friend, but was awed when he beheld the Universal Form, so was Haribā transformed. With steadfast devotion he now served, understanding the Lord's inner will and performing kīrtana for the good of all.

Now, O faithful hearers, attend to another sweet and profound tale. On the banks of the Godavari lay a small and humble village, wherein dwelt a brāhmaṇa who served as the village accountant. His means were meagre, yet his household was blessed—or burdened—with many children, so much so that he had not enough food to feed them all.

The youngest among them was a boy, but he was dull-witted, slow of speech, and unable to speak clearly. The village women, with rustic affection, called him by the nickname "Gāvabā." Though the years passed, and he grew to eight years of age, he never gave a proper answer to anything.

When the time came, his father performed for him the sacred rite of investiture with the sacred thread. Yet the boy could not utter the Gāyatrī mantra, nor even speak the names Keśava or Nārāyaṇa. The elders remarked that perhaps in a previous life he had been normal, but in this final birth he had been born mute. He could eat his fill, but not utter even a single word in reply.

It seemed that the weight of countless past misdeeds had resulted in such a birth, and the parents were ever anxious about what would become of him in the end. Truly, when a son is born witless through the binding force of past karma, the father's life is filled with sorrow.

Now, it happened that one day the brāhmaṇa's household was celebrating a festival. Rich and sweet preparations were made, and the boy ate heartily. The next morning, little Gāvabā asked his mother for a flatbread. She had one left from the previous day, and quickly heated it to give him.

That night, however, he had nothing to eat, and so he gestured insistently to his mother the next morning, pointing for the bread. Angered, she rebuked him sharply, saying, "Wretched child! You come demanding sweets when there is nothing even to eat!"

Crying, the boy rolled upon the ground, then rose at once and went back to his mother, still motioning for the bread. Seeing this, the mother's heart was softened. She thought, "What shall I do with his obstinate ways?" Taking him by the hand, she decided to take him to Paiṭhaṇ—thus leading him towards the destiny the Lord had ordained.

The compassionate mother, holding her mute son by the hand, came to the home of Śrī Eknātha. With heartfelt devotion she bowed before the saint, placed little Gāvabā at his feet, and prayed, "O merciful one, please accept him under your care. He is now nine years of age, yet he cannot utter even a single word. He only gestures when he desires sweetmeats. What remedy can there be for such a plight? We are but poor, orphan-like brāhmaṇas, dwelling in a remote and humble village. Here in your holy presence, we hear, sacred feasts are daily offered to brāhmaṇas, with delicious food in abundance. Hearing of your boundless compassion, I have brought him here, hoping you might let him remain in your household."

Śrīnātha, hearing her plea, spoke with words like nectar, granting his consent. He instructed Girijābāī, "From this day, take care of this boy daily, keeping love for him in your heart." By Eknātha's command, Gāvabā was bathed and given fresh water, then lovingly seated to partake of the sacred meal.

The boy's mother, her heart overflowing with joy, offered reverent thanks and, after speaking privately with Śrīnātha, returned to her own village. To her husband she related the events: "The mute boy has been placed under the care of the great Nātha. Now we must put aside all possessiveness and not cling to him with worldly attachment. By great fortune he has obtained so blessed a home." Thus, the parents felt deep satisfaction, convinced that his life would turn to the good.

Meanwhile, Śrī Eknātha himself clothed the boy with his own hands, fed him in the evenings, and let him spend his days freely playing among the other children. Soon he forgot all thought of his parents, for here his heart was content; and with the daily enjoyment of delicious food, his body grew strong and well-nourished.

One day, when Eknātha was sitting alone in his shrine, he called Gāvabā before him and began to teach him the holy repetition of the name of Rāma. But the boy, still mute and dull of mind, could not form even a single syllable. Seeing this, the saint said with gentle resolve, "If he cannot speak our sacred Name, then what is the use?"

In that very instant, by the grace of the Master, the boy's speech burst forth. Eknātha at once taught him the mantra again, now giving it to him deliberately, and with his own hands tied a knotted thread for him to wear, saying, "This is your japa—repeat it always without fail."

From that moment, Gāvabā had met his true Guru and friend, and deliverance began to dawn for him. Games and play were forgotten; he now rejoiced in the sweetness of devotion. He spoke no idle words to anyone; his heart was fixed upon the thought of Eknātha. Worldly tastes and desires, once strong in him, were overcome; and with only the simplest of food, he now spent day and night in bhajan.

The villagers, seeing such a transformation, marvelled among themselves, saying, "Surely, this is the direct fruit of the Nātha's grace—his entire nature has changed!" Even when his parents came to visit, the boy showed no clinging affection; his mind was no longer bound to them.

In the passing of some days, an extraordinary event took place. Eknātha was one day seated in deep meditation in his shrine. Suddenly, before him, Śrī Rāma Himself manifested, gently arousing him with His own hands. When the saint opened his eyes and mind, there stood the beloved Lord of Jānakī.

Overcome with love, Eknātha fell at His lotus feet, embracing them, then clasped Raghunātha Himself to his heart in an ecstasy of devotion. The Lord, smiling with affection, commanded him, "Take the Rāmāyaṇa composed by Śrī Vālmīki, and render it into the Prākṛta language in your own words."

Humbly, Eknātha replied, "O Lord of Ayodhyā, the seven kāṇḍas of Your glorious life are beyond my comprehension. Though I might attempt the translation in the style of the ancient seers, my lifespan is short. How can I be sure the work will be brought to completion? This doubt troubles my heart."

Then Rāma spoke reassuringly: "Observe your daily discipline of bathing and sandhyā prayers; in the time that remains, write the Rāmāyaṇa unfailingly. Your loving devotion and sincerity are dear to Me. Therefore, let this work be known as the Bhāvārtha Rāmāyaṇa.

"I shall dwell ever in your heart, dark-hued as the rain-cloud, and give you remembrance at all times. In the course of your writing, do not be troubled about the constraints of time, for I shall make the completion certain."

So saying, the descendent of Raghu, Lord Rama, departed, and Eknātha, with folded hands, bowed low at His lotus feet, declaring, “Your word is my only authority; there is no other knot or binding for me than Your command.”

Having spoken thus, the Lord of Ayodhya at once vanished from sight, departing with swiftness, yet from that moment He established His dwelling firmly in the heart of Eknath. Observing an auspicious hour, the saint began his work upon the sacred Ramayana. To the hearts of the faithful and loving devotees, this was a cause of deep joy and bliss.

Each day, as the composition of the holy text advanced, the daily recitation continued, and the nectar-like essence of the story brought forth a sweetness surpassing ambrosia itself. So enraptured were the listeners that they forgot all sense of body and self. Upon the verses composed by Valmiki, Eknath inscribed his own Marathi commentary. As the audience listened, their minds became utterly absorbed, motionless, and filled with loving devotion.

In the beginning, the saint completed the Bala Kanda. Thereafter he began the Ayodhya Kanda, and this too he brought to perfection. Then came the Aranya Kanda, wherein the beloved scion of Raghu went into the forest exile. The Kishkindha Kanda followed and reached completion, so that the Ramayana progressed toward its fullness.

With firm resolve he entered upon the Sundara Kanda, wherein Hanuman’s wondrous deeds shone forth. Having restored Sita’s honor and purity, the Lord of the Raghus prepared to proceed toward Lanka. Then Eknath commenced the Yuddha Kanda with his own hands. The narration reached its forty-fourth chapter when the time of the saint’s own earthly departure drew near.

He declared, “My hour of departure is now truly at hand.” On hearing this, the hearts of the devotees were seized with distress. They said, “O Master, we implore you—let the Ramayana be brought to completion by your own lips. The Yuddha Kanda has not yet reached its full conclusion, and the Uttara Kanda remains untouched. How can you take leave before the holy work stands whole? Delay your departure until the scripture is completed in its entirety.”

Thus did the righteous devotees make their humble plea, but to them Shri Eknath replied, “When the appointed time of death has made its abode within this body, it does not fail to keep its hour.” Even so, the listeners spoke again: “When Krishnadas Lolia once came to you for refuge, did you not, through your grace, delay his death by eleven days, that he might finish the Yuddha Kanda? In the same way, hold back time for this great purpose, so that we may witness the joyful completion of your sacred composition. Then shall all hearts be satisfied.”

The saint responded, “Listen well: to defy the appointed time for the sake of bringing my own poetic work to conclusion would seem to me an unworthy act. The completion of the Yuddha Kanda and the true fulfillment of the Uttara Kanda will now be brought about by Gavaji. In this there can be no other way.”

At these words, wonder filled the assembly. They thought, “How can Gavaji, who has been mute from birth, speak even a single word? How shall he recite the Ramayana?” But Shri Eknath, calling Gavaji near, bestowed his blessing. Placing his hand with love upon Gavaji’s head, he gave him his own writing instrument, saying, “The inspiration of poetic speech that dwells within this body, let it now abide in you.”

At once, by this grace, Gavaji’s intellect expanded, and taking the pen in hand, he began to inscribe letters upon the palm-leaf manuscript. His words flowed with the same beauty and measure as Eknath’s own verses, and when a chapter was completed, the devotees listened in astonishment. They exclaimed, “By the saint’s grace, the mute has become eloquent! His speech is sweet as nectar, and surely he will bring the scripture to its perfect end.”

Thus, in the very presence of Eknath, Gavaji completed a chapter, and in due time, he brought the remaining portion of the text to full completion.

When the festival of Phalguna Vadya Panchami arrived, Shri Eknath performed kirtan with great devotion, and after distributing the sanctified offerings to all, he said, “Hear my one request. Tomorrow, when I depart, you must all come after bathing, accompany my body to the Godavari, and then proceed to the temple.”

Hearing these words, the devotees were filled with grief, knowing that the divine incarnation was nearing its earthly end. On the following morning, the assembly gathered at the saint’s residence. At that hour, Shri Eknath became restless and fell suddenly into a swoon. Seeing this, sorrow arose in every heart, and their eyes filled with tears as they gazed upon the saint’s countenance.

Yet among the malicious and the crooked-minded, there were some who spoke unwisely, saying, “He has shown many wonders in life, yet in death the end is as for all others. In the end, will his body not be borne upon the shoulders of men like any mortal?” But the devotees knew the truth—that the saint’s passing was not like the common lot, for the Lord Himself awaited His servant’s return.

When the devout heard the malicious whisper of the slanderer, their hearts were grieved. At such moments, they would recall the glorious life and noble fame of Eknath Maharaj, as one remembers the cooling shade in the heat of the sun. They would say among themselves, “The very purpose of your embodied descent was the upliftment of the world. For this reason, we cannot even conceive of your mortal departure.”

Hearing this tender sentiment of his devotees, Shri Nath became alert, like one suddenly awakened from repose. Seeing him thus, the devotees clapped in joyous acclaim, crying out the name of Vitthal with voices that resounded like the roar of clouds. The gathering was filled with bliss.

Then the Master commanded Uddhava to swiftly bring water for his bath. After bathing with due sanctity and order, he clothed himself in pure, freshly washed garments with his own

hands. Seating himself upon his seat, he adorned his forehead with twelve vertical marks of sacred Gopichandan, and around his neck he placed the tulsi garland with the affection of his innermost heart.

With the name of Janardana on his lips, and uttering the Taraka Mantra, he immersed his mind in contemplation, and then, roaring aloud with the remembrance of Vitthal, he took the vina upon his shoulder. Singing the divine virtues of Shri Hari, he bowed to Panduranga and held that beautiful form firmly within his meditation.

From his mouth arose the thunder of the Lord's name. Leaving the house in that sacred ecstasy, he walked forth, the people worshipping him with loving hearts, for they felt blessed and knew the very earth had been sanctified by his presence. They offered flowers and tulsi garlands at his feet, performing worship at each step. Men and women brought forth many forms of arati, their voices raised in devotion.

As they beheld the form of Shri Nath, tears welled in their eyes, for they thought, "Such a vision may never again be ours." From far-off places people had come in great numbers, carrying banners, singing in dindis, and uttering the name of the Lord at every moment. The roads became so crowded that movement was hindered, the sound of the name of Hari filling the sky like a canopy of joy.

Outside the village, as they proceeded in a festive procession, the throng was dense both before and behind. When they came to Lakshmi Tirth on the river Godavari, the Lord, seated in his palanquin, received a shower of flowers from the hands of the celestial ones. Countless blue lotuses fell upon the earth, and the people beheld this wonder with eyes like blossoming lotus-petals, their hands striking the cymbals in the glory of the Lord's name.

Blessed indeed were those who beheld such marvels, for even the hidden hosts of Vrindavan gazed upon the scene with wonder. Reaching the sandy banks of the Godavari, Shri Nath commanded all to quiet their minds and listen to the virtues of Shri Hari. Hearing his words, the gathering was filled with deep contentment. All sat—men and women alike—fixing their gaze upon his form.

Then, raising his voice in the name of Vitthal, Shri Nath began the Harikirtan, speaking wondrously of the greatness of devotion, and reminding them of the futility of argument. "In this age of Kali," he said, "there is no other means of deliverance apart from the Holy Name. Let there be compassion for all beings—hold this truth firmly in your hearts. Know that for your welfare I have come to this mortal world, though my true nature is the eternal servant of Supreme Lord."

The saints in the assembly asked, "Will there yet be future descents of you (Eknath)?" With compassion, Shri Nath replied, "Hear now the abhang I recite, for it shall be written as a sacred testament at the time of my departure." And he spoke: "When the path of righteousness is broken, and the banner of unrighteousness is raised high, then it becomes necessary for me to come into the world to restore order. When false creeds and divisive

rituals abound, they are to be subdued by the singing of the Lord's glories. Every divine play of Hari is my own independent sport; there is no difference between God and His devotee. Every form the Lord assumes is benfit of the world, and the garland of the Lord's holy name is strung for the upliftment of the world. Let the feeling of God's presence in all beings be the true sustenance of devotion, for thus is righteousness nourished. Peace and compassion toward all must be upheld as the Vedas declare. The Lord who assumes forms for the sake of play is eternally free; where then is any real separation? To speak of distinctions in the vision of the Universal Form is to err gravely. In the tale of the calves' deliverance, the calves and the cowherd boys were none other than the Lord Himself. He who holds a sense of difference even here is to be most greatly pitied."

Having thus spoken, Shri Nath entrusted the written testament into Uddhava's hands. Then, in the midst of the chanting of Vitthal's holy name, the clashing of cymbals, and the singing of the arati, all joined their voices: "Beholding his Guru Janardana, having the vision is of Supreme Lord."

Ever did the Lord's presence shine before their eyes, yet the mind could not fully fathom Him. Whatever the eyes beheld, they knew to be the blessed vision of the Divine. All feelings of absence were swallowed up in the joy of His nearness; a new and wondrous ārati arose from the heart of Eknath himself.

In that very moment, Śrīnātha sang the ārati with his own lips. His voice, swelling with the roar of the Lord's Holy Name, resounded like the waves of a holy river. Bowing to the ground in deep reverence, he placed his entire being at the Lord's lotus feet. Then, rising, he joined his palms and lovingly entreated all gathered souls to abide in divine grace, and again offered prostrations.

Hearing such words, tears welled in the eyes of all present. Saints such as Jayanātha and Eknātha bowed in that same instant, their hearts moved beyond measure.

Then Eknātha, entering the sacred waters of Godavari, walked calmly until the river reached his navel. There he stood still, lost in remembrance of Lord Hari, and led all in chanting the holy Name. When his heart was wholly immersed in the Lord, he released his breath from the body, as divine blossoms showered from above.

Those who had come to behold him now wept in the intimacy of pure love. The body was consigned to the funeral pyre according to the worldly custom. Seeing the saint's mahā-nirvāṇa, attaining the abode of Supreme Lord, the people returned home, but grief had taken hold of them, and the news spread everywhere.

The next day, when his son and others came to collect the sacred ashes, they beheld a marvel—within the cremation ground had sprung forth a plant of the holy Kṛṣṇa-tulasī, and beside it an Aśvattha sapling. The tender, glistening green leaves filled every heart with joy. The people said, "Indeed, in the form of this Aśvattha, Śrīnātha has manifest again!"

In the middle of this sacred Aśvattha, they enshrined a little grove named Vṛndāvana. Therein, in a small shrine, the saint's holy sandals were placed. To this day, that spot remains awakened with his presence. Men and women of the kṣetra serve there constantly, and the gracious Śrīnātha fulfils the heart's wish of every true devotee.

As is the feeling in the heart, so does the Lord of lords reveal Himself. On the sixth day of the bright fortnight, they celebrate a wondrous festival, adorning the place with a splendid silk pāiṭhaṇī. In the form of the Aśvattha tree, Śrī Eknātha grants direct vision to his people.

There are yet other marvellous events at this sacred spot—listen, O faithful souls! Lest the Vṛndāvana be damaged, the Aśvattha has remained small in stature; such is the saint's perfect humility, unfathomed even by Brahmā and the gods. Blessed indeed are the dwellers of this holy land, for they behold his presence always. The darśana of his sandals redeems countless fallen souls.

It is known that one who hears of Śrīnātha's departure from this world will meet his own end without suffering; the King of Vaikuṇṭha, being pleased, will bring him to His own abode. By the command of Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga, these matters have been faithfully written. Otherwise, I, a dull and ignorant one, could never fathom the full measure of the saints' lives.

In the chapter to come will be told the sweet and boundless life of the Vaiṣṇava devotee Tukārāma. That humble servant of Rukmiṇī's Lord, the compassionate friend of the forlorn, who gave fearlessness to kings and uplifted all with his noble conduct, will there be revealed.

Thus concludes the twenty-fourth chapter of the Śrī Bhakta-līlāmṛta, sweet to the loving ears of faithful devotees, wherein sixteen verses and āratis are counted, and the heart's longing is fulfilled by the mere act of hearing.

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Chapter 25

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Śrī Gaṇeśa)

All glory to Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga, the beloved of Rukmiṇī — the Unshaken, the Immutable, the Unchanging. He is the embodiment of divine play, the ocean of compassion, the Lord of all, the Primeval Person. I, destitute and without refuge, have come with a pure heart to surrender myself at the feet of Śrī Hari, the Supreme above all. By the glance of His mercy, may I be ferried across the ocean of worldly existence to the farther shore. I know not the study of the Vedas and Śāstras, nor the intricacies of austerities, penances, and observances. I understand not the refinements of Sanskrit, nor the doctrine of liberation, nor the subtle knowledge of the Spirit. Yet, O Lord of Rukmiṇī, a deep love for Thee has arisen in my heart. If I can recount the glory of Thy servants, then may that very desire be fulfilled through Thy grace. I am neither a clever nor a skillful poet; I possess not the vast strength of intellect. In every way I am as one lame and helpless — this Thou knowest well, O dark-hued Lord.

When a true giver supports the destitute, the beggar finds relief from his worldly burdens; when a blind man is led by the hand of one who sees, he is swiftly brought to his destination. So too, O Lord of Paṇḍharī, the weight of all rests upon Thy head. Give me, the orphaned soul, the courage of Thy protection, and bid me to speak forth the tales of Thy devotees. The wondrous glory of Thy servants is sung by the Vaiṣṇavas in the religion of the Bhāgavata. That nectar of the devotees' deeds — Bhakta Līlāmṛta — place, O Lord of Rukmiṇī, into my hands. When the wind roars in the sky, the trees sway by its power; likewise, Thou, O dark-blue Lord, art the giver of intellect, for I have no strength of my own.

Now, let my mind be fixed and my speech offered respectfully to the listener. Hear with reverence of the loving devotion of Tukārām, by which he bound the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha under the spell of love. The beginning of his story I shall relate in detail, that the wise devotees may listen. He, the world-teacher, the hero among Vaiṣṇavas, descended truly upon the earth.

Born in the Śūdra caste, Tukārām was a Vaiṣṇava devotee. He came as the very embodiment of the world's deliverance, a manifestation of the divine guru. In his lineage, the family deity from ancient times was the Lord of Paṇḍharī, who even appeared in visible form, revealing the wonder of divine love. Then, the listeners, struck with curiosity, respectfully questioned the speaker: "Tell us, who brought Tukā's forefathers to the Lord of Paṇḍharī?"

Hearing their inquiry, the narrator was filled with joy. "Since you have asked truly," he said, "let me recount that tale."

Viśvambhara Bāva, the king among devotees, was an ancestor of Tukārām. For the sake of his devotion, the Lord with the Garuḍa banner came of His own accord, moved by love.

How did Viśvambhara serve the Lord of Rukmiṇī? That, in its proper sequence, shall I now describe to the saints with reverence.

In worldly dealings, he acted with excellence, never speaking untruth. The wealth and grain that came to him by destiny, he gave away in meritorious works. He welcomed with honor sādhus, saints, Vaiṣṇava devotees, pilgrims, and noble brāhmaṇas, bringing them home and worshipping them with love. While carrying out the duties of household life, he continually remembered the Lord's Name upon his lips. By night, gathering the faithful, he would perform joyous kīrtana. With the beat of cymbals and the deep sound of the mṛdaṅga, the very essence of nāda-brahman arose. He sang especially the stories of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, that the people might hear and be uplifted. Filled with compassion towards all beings, he was ready to give his very life in service to others. Thus, in the course of his devotional life, his nature became wholly sanctified.

His mother would remind him, "Now it is time to go to Paṇḍharī; make yourself ready at once."

In the tradition of his forefathers, the pilgrimage to Paṇḍharī was ever upheld, never omitted. By this, even in worldly life, they attained true fulfillment. Thus, Viśvambhara, already a loving servant of the Lord, heard his mother's counsel, just as a virtuous brāhmaṇa receives the authority of the revealed word. As when a seeker, scorched by the triple afflictions, swiftly gains the refuge of holy company, so too did this teaching take root in his heart, bringing him peace. Or, as a devoted disciple, already guided by his guru, rejoices in the hearing and chanting of Lord Hari's glories, so was Viśvambhara's mind filled with bliss. Just as Madālasā, instructing her own son in the truths of the Spirit, awakened in him detachment from the world, so too was detachment born in the mind of Viśvambhara.

Then he said to his mother, "Well have you taught me." Bowing to her with eightfold prostration, he set out upon the holy journey. On the way, he came upon pilgrims, quickly recognizing them as fellow-vārkarīs. Joining their company, he reached the sacred kṣetra of Paṇḍharī. With a repentant and humble heart, he bathed in the Chandrabhāgā, then took darśana of Puṇḍalīka and worshipped him with devotion. He circumambulated the holy area, bringing the whole of Paṇḍharī into his meditation, and soon reached the great gate of the temple, bowing full-length upon the ground. He saluted Garuḍa and Hanumān with love, and there heard the Vaiṣṇavas singing kīrtana, which gladdened his heart. That Supreme, Eternal Lord — the jewel of His devotee's heart — he now beheld, fixing his gaze upon the tip of His nose, his mind absorbed. The sight filled him with supreme joy — the Lord standing upon the brick, the elder of the universe, hands upon His hips. Sacred dust was smeared upon His limbs; His neck was adorned with soft tulasī garlands. Beholding the dark-blue beauty, Viśvambhara's heart overflowed with bliss.

That Lord, compassionate to His devotees and the father of the yogis, seeing Viśvambhara, embraced him at once. The realtion between God and His devotees cannot be described by the cleverest of men; why then should one of limited mind boast in vain? Having seen the

Lord's transcendental form with his eyes, he treasured it in the jewel-box of his heart, rejoicing inwardly at the festival of divine bliss manifest upon earth. Thus, spending five nights there in the order of the pilgrimage, he was filled with satisfaction in the chanting of the Lord's Holy Name. Receiving the Lord's permission, he swiftly returned to his own village. Fixing his mind upon the lotus feet of Viṭṭhala, Viśvambhara returned to his home. Entering the house with deep affection, he first bowed to his mother.

Sitting near her in peace, he recounted all that had transpired, saying, "Mother, the glory of that holy place is truly wondrous — beholding it has pierced my heart."

Though he dwelt at home, every moment his thoughts turned to Paṇḍharī. He saw ever in his mind's eye Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga, standing upon the brick, clad in the sky, upon the bank of the Bhīmā. He would say, "Blessed, blessed is the sacred Paṇḍharpur! Blessed is Muralīdhara, the Flute-player! Great indeed is the glory of Padma Tīrtha — I remember it again and again."

He thought of the Chandrabhāgā as his sister, of Puṇḍalīka as his kinsman and friend, of Rāi and Satyabhāmā as his mothers, and of Rukmiṇī Devī as his own Divine Mother. In his heart, Viśvambhara would muse, "When shall I again behold the Lord of Rukmiṇī?" Tears would flow from his eyes, and his throat would grow choked with emotion. The dark-hued Lord, who plays with His loving devotees, is the joy of the world; blessed are all creatures who remember Him at all times. As a maiden in her husband's house constantly thinks of her mother, or as a calf longs to return to its mother's side, or as a miser wanders in the market remembering the treasure he has buried in the ground, so was Viśvambhara's heart ever fixed upon the feet of Viṭṭhala.

"O merciful Pāṇḍuraṅga," he would say, "I feel the pang of separation from Thee."

One day, on the ninth lunar tithi (Navami Tithi), rising swiftly at dawn, he set out along with the Vaiṣṇava devotees of Paṇḍharpur. Travelling day and night along the road, he reached the holy kṣetra. Bathing in the Chandrabhāgā, he went for the darśana of Viṭhobā. There stood the Lord, feet upon the brick, hands upon His hips, slender and beautiful. Beholding the Digambara form in meditation, Viśvambhara forgot all bodily consciousness. The Lord embraced him lovingly, holding him at His feet, and by that touch removed the triple afflictions. Viśvambhara was filled with the bliss of one beyond the body. On Daśamī, he ate but once, observing the fast; on Ekādaśī he remained without food, keeping vigil in the Lord's presence, listening to the loud kīrtana with love in his heart. On Dvādaśī, he broke the fast in the company of Vaiṣṇava devotees, and with joy dwelt in the company of the saints, ever near Lord Jagannātha (Pāṇḍuraṅga). The sight of the saints was his constant delight, and even Time could not avert his gaze from them. Lord Padmanābha Himself stood near, moved by that loving devotion. Thus, for three nights he remained in the sacred place, and then sought the Lord's permission to depart.

At the moment of farewell, the eyes of the Lord of the worlds brimmed with tears. “Your absence,” He said, “is more than I can bear.” Choked with emotion, His eyes overflowing, the Lord spoke: “To be apart from your lotus feet, O Viṭṭhala, fills Me with yearning.”

Hearing these words, what could the Lord of the worlds say further? “Without you here, this place feels empty. As vast as the sky is the air that pervades it; in the same way, O Śārṅgadhara, I pervade all things, moving and unmoving. As the earth is lit by the light of countless jewels, so do I, the Imperceptible One, dwell in the hearts of all. As ornaments differ in form but are all of the same gold, so to the ignorant the world appears manifold, yet it is all Myself, O Viśvambhara. When the ornaments are melted away, the gold remains the same; even so, at the dissolution of the worlds, I alone remain — indestructible and eternal. This is My majesty and My yoga, which the knowers of the Vedas have described. Bearing this truth in your heart, return home at once.”

Viśvambhara replied to Hṛṣīkeśa, “Let this knowledge remain with Thee, my Lord. My love is bound fast to Thy manifested transcendental form, and this attachment is firm in me. The Universal vast vision cannot be measured by the logic of the Vedas; how then can I, a mere creature, find joy there? When Thou speakest of the Universal majesty, how can I sing Thy glories there? How can I offer embraces to One with a majestic Universal form? If Thy form knows no sorrow, then how can I render Thee my loving service? Tell me, O Lord of Śrī, how could I hear Thy glories if they were without form?”

Hearing this, the Lord of the worlds laughed gently. “From your words,” He said, “one might sweeten a lemon.”

Then the Lord, Friend of His devotees and Protector of the lowly, placed His hand upon Viśvambhara’s head. “Wherever you chant My holy name,” He said, “I will surely be there.”

Thus speaking, the beloved of Rukmiṇī swiftly imparted to him the mantra of the Lord’s Name, and sent Viśvambhara home — yet his love for the Lord’s manifest form only deepened.

Thereafter, on every Ekādaśī, he would go to Paṇḍharī, keeping this vow unfailingly, and finding in it unsurpassed joy. From the month of Kārtika until Jyeṣṭha, he made sixteen such pilgrimages, beholding the Lord’s beautiful form each time. Seeing this state of Viśvambhara, the people were amazed, and the three kinds of men spoke variously about it.

Some said, “He has cast aside all worldly thought, and fixed his mind wholly upon Viṭhobā. Why then should he weary himself with these fifteen-day journeys?”

Even if troubled by worldly life, yet he dwelt happily in Paṇḍharī; and since he loved both his home and the holy place, he returned to each in turn. Some called him blessed, while others, speaking without understanding, criticized him in vain; but no one of that time could be found with a devotion equal to his. Thus, whether in praise or in blame, Viśvambhara regarded all alike, for his heart was wholly bound to the Lord’s form.

He was a loving devotee whose attachment to the Lord's manifest form was unshakable; and in this attachment he acted in wondrous and marvelous ways.

For eight months, every fortnight, he had gone to Paṇḍharī, until at last the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha became indebted to his service. In the ninth month, on the night of Aṣṭamī, as Viśvambhara slept, the Lord of Rukmiṇī came to him in a dream and spoke: "O Viśvambhara, my friend, you have made Me a debtor to your service. Now I have come Myself to your village, and you need not come to Paṇḍharī for My darśana. Your kindness to Me has been very great, and this debt of Mine to you is real. I have now come to dwell here, drawn by your love."

Speaking thus, the Lord with the discus in His hand went to the mango grove, and lay down to rest there. Awakening, Viśvambhara remembered the Lord with love, marveling: "By the strange play of destiny, the Lord of Rukmiṇī has come to meet me! After meeting me, He has gone to the mango grove to rest; I must go at once and see Him there."

In the village there were many Vaiṣṇavas; he told them the secret of his heart: "In a dream I saw that the Lord has come here from Paṇḍharī."

Hearing this, they said, "Then let us go at once and bring the beloved of Rukmiṇī to the village." This news filled their hearts with wonder.

The villagers too gathered in the assembly, joining the company of devotees. Yet among them were some who lacked devotion, whose minds harbored doubts. To such as these, the truth did not reveal itself. They murmured among themselves, saying that Vishwambhar must have been lost in meditation, and perhaps whatever he claimed to have seen was but a dream. Others reasoned that the Lord had indeed granted His very form with attributes, but how could such an unprecedented event truly occur? A few scoffed at the doubt itself, asking, "When one holds a bangle in the hand, why is a mirror needed to see it? Why question a reality that stands before our eyes?" In such ways, each entertained their own thoughts, and together the villagers walked on with Vishwambhar, their hearts secretly stirred with joy at his company.

Singing kirtans, clapping in rhythm, and dancing, they reached the grove of mango trees. There, they did not see the Lord of Pandharpur Himself, but a wondrous fragrance began to spread all around. Among the grass and soil lay fragrant flowers, bunches of tulsi leaves, and sacred blossoms scattered upon that very spot. All who beheld this marvel were filled with wonder. Some said, "Let us see if this is truly but a matter of dreams," but they added, "Perhaps our own hearts lack purity, and that is why the Lord does not manifest to us."

At that moment, Vishwambhar spoke, saying, "Look—dig here in the earth!" As he said this, a divine voice echoed from the sky, heard clearly by all. It declared that one who had come from Vaikuntha itself had arrived in person to meet Vishwambhar, and that the earth should be dug with one's own hands to bring Him forth. The voice further proclaimed, "In the future, from His flute-playing, a great hero of the Vaishnava path will arise, whose kirtans will resound and bring deliverance to the world."

Hearing this, the assembly of devotees was filled with joy. They clapped to the chanting of the Lord's name, and the waves of the kirtan roared ever louder. Vishwambhar himself began to dig with his hands, and along with him the Vaishnava devotees dug into the soil. Soon, many bunches of tulsi leaves emerged from the earth, and before their eyes appeared the enchanting form of Panduranga—dark-hued and gracious, standing with Mother Rukmini at His left. She was delicate and beautiful, and the Lord was clad in a divine yellow garment, adorned with a garland of tulsi flowers. The sight of this divine form drew forth exclamations of victory and joy from the devotees.

Vishwambhar lovingly lifted the Lord's deity and, with the villagers singing the name of Vitthala and the devotees dancing in kirtan, brought Him near to the village. There, by the bank of the holy Indrayani, whose mere sight grants liberation, the deity was installed. Calling learned Vedic Brahmins, they performed all the sacred rites, bathing the divine couple with milk, curd, ghee, honey, sugar, and jaggery mixed together as panchamrit. After the ablutions, the Lord was clothed in fresh garments, a fine yellow robe was placed upon Him, and He was adorned with earrings, crown, and ornaments befitting Keshava. Tulsi leaves and flowers were offered, the waving of lamps and incense was done with love, and rich food offerings were presented while the Brahmins chanted Vedic mantras. To the best of their ability, they fed the Brahmins, while the Vaishnavas engaged in singing the Lord's praises, and all the villagers devoted themselves to day-and-night worship.

That night, in the stillness, Vishwambhar offered his heartfelt prayer: "Glory, glory to Thee, ocean of compassion, beloved of Rukmini! Thou alone pervadest the three worlds. Even the great Lord Shiva contemplates Thee, yet Thy darshan is rare indeed. Today, on the bank of the Indrayani, Thou hast come for my sake, O Vitthala. I am without service, without devotion, and know not how to perform proper worship. Yet Thou art the brother of the forsaken, the embodiment of mercy—this I have now fully realized."

Hearing this prayer, the Lord of Rukmini asked, "Tell Me, O devotee, what desire dwells in thy heart." Vishwambhar replied, "May I ever have love for Thy worship; may I gain the company of saints, for Thou knowest my heart's longing, O Vitthala. May devotion to Thee remain in my family for generations to come—this is all I seek." He further prayed, "May this place endure like a Kalpavriksha, granting liberation to all embodied souls who behold it. May Dehu village remain a sacred field, and may my eyes dwell upon Thee forever."

Smiling, the Lord of the helpless replied, "The wish thou hast cherished in thy heart—I shall fulfill it without end." Thus blessing him, the Lord stood there, and Vishwambhar fell at His lotus feet. All the people of the sacred place likewise engaged themselves wholly in the worship of the Lord.

As the days passed in loving fellowship, the appointed time of departure drew near. Then, from Vaikuṇṭha itself, there came a celestial Puṣpaka chariot, arriving close at hand. The messengers of Lord Viṣṇu addressed him gently, saying, "Now you must journey to Vaikuṇṭha." Hearing these tidings, Viśvambhara turned to the Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga and spoke:

“O Śrīhari, my two sons and my wife remain devotedly in Thy service; now I too shall depart for the holy city of Vaikuṇṭha, in steadfast union with Thee, O Viṭṭhala.”

Thus speaking, and in that very moment filling his speech with the roar of Hari’s remembrance, he released his life-breath from the mortal frame and was seated in a resplendent celestial vehicle. Sweet notes resounded with the chanting of the Holy Name; Gandharvas sang in melodious tones. In this manner Viśvambhara attained the blessed city of Vaikuṇṭha.

By the merit of his own virtuous deeds, he reached the proximity of Lord Viṣṇu Himself. There, enjoying the supreme and unparalleled liberation of complete union, the devotee and Vaiṣṇava partook of divine bliss. But let Viśvambhara rest in his eternal abode; now let us, at our leisure, hear with delight the manner of his life’s story.

Viśvambhara’s wife was known as Amābāī. With deep devotion she too worshipped the Lord who reclines upon Śeṣa. The couple had two sons, named Hari and Mukunda; yet Amābāī’s mind remained detached from worldly entanglements, and she engaged herself with loving devotion in ceaseless bhajana.

Compassion towards all beings flowed equally from her; she harbored no distinction of self and other, and by the earnest remembrance of the Lord’s feet, she bound the King of Paṇḍharpur to her will. Through the constancy of her worship, the foremost among the worlds granted her direct vision. In dreams He would come to her, awakening her with divine conversation.

He said, “Seeing thy devotion, O blessed one, I, the bearer of Garuḍa, am pleased. If there is aught that thou desirest to accomplish, tell it unto Me.” When Śārṅgadhara thus enquired, Amābāī replied with sincerity: “Without Thee, no other attainment appeals to me, O Śrīhari. I desire neither enjoyment nor liberation, nor any wealth or prosperity. In Thy worship alone may my heart remain steadfast. Apart from this, any wish within me would be but a vain delusion.”

Hearing her words, the consort of Rukmiṇī smiled and said, “Blessed mother, thy understanding is most pure. May it remain thus, O thrice-holy one. I, the ocean of compassion, am well-pleased and shall keep thee near My lotus feet.” Amābāī, with the joy of love, replied, “Thou alone art the awakener of understanding; such is declared by the Śrutis, by the śāstras, and by the many utterances of poets.”

So speaking, she fell prostrate before Him. Then the Lord who reclines upon Śeṣa, in delight, lifted her up and held her to His heart. The vision of this dream ended, and in but a moment she awoke; then, after remembering Hari, she sat in wonder.

Amābāī’s heart remained free from selfish desire; she asked for no wealth or possession. Yet Lakṣmīpati considered Himself indebted to her, and therefore He caused every perfection

to follow her. Without her engaging in any worldly striving, all things became favorable in her household; whatever she desired came to her in due time.

But when perfection becomes favorable in this way, often the mind of a seeker is disturbed; with the growth of worldly engagements, the threefold purity of the soul is diminished. Wherever there is indulgence in sense-objects, there the mind feels no remorse; and where there is no remorse, sin naturally multiplies.

It is as when the night falls and spirits rise from the cremation ground—upon seeing a man of no former merit, they bring him sorrow and misery; or as when a crooked man enters an assembly, slander soon follows—so too, when the mind becomes attached to sense-enjoyment, evil overpowers it with ease.

Therefore do saints and holy men keep themselves free from such entanglements; they go in solitude to the forest and engage in the worship of Śrīhari. Yet, despite all this counsel, all perfections now attended the household of Amābāī; but alas, in the hearts of her own sons, remembrance of Hari began to fade.

In solitude, the two sat together and spoke from the affection of their own minds: "Why should we not have armies, horses, palanquins, ornaments, and all such things for ourselves? Meeting with the king, we should render service to him; adopting the duties of the kṣatriya order, we could enjoy every prosperity."

With these thoughts, they bowed to their mother and revealed their hearts to her, saying, "We shall go to the royal court, and following the ways of the warrior-class, we will live in royal service and partake of all wealth."

At that time, Amāī said gently to her sons, "What want do you suffer in this home? The Lord Viṭṭhoba Himself shall provide for all your welfare, your sustenance and your protection." Yet, though these were the words of a mother's tender counsel, they did not please the hearts of her sons. Perceiving their firm intention, she at last gave her consent. Then Hari and Mukunda, both bowing with full prostration to their mother, departed at once and went to seek audience with the king.

Observing their courage and skill, the ruler bestowed upon them much wealth. In his heart, he thought to summon their mother also, bringing her with all the household into royal service. Without delay, he sent a letter to Amāī, dispatching horses and attendants for her conveyance.

When she read the letter, concern weighed upon her heart. She thought, "My Viṭṭhala now remains far from me." Bowing before the sacred deity of Pāṇḍuraṅga, her eyes filled with tears, and she said, "O Lord, Thy holy feet have been distanced from me through my own doings." Speaking thus, her voice became choked with feeling. Then, gathering her necessary belongings, she set out upon the road.

Taking with her both daughters-in-law, she journeyed to meet her sons. Yet, even as she went, her five vital breaths were drawn inward toward the Lord, her beloved Viṭṭhala. As a miser who wanders the market yet keeps his mind fixed upon the safety of his treasure, as calves bound with rope turn their gaze constantly toward their mother, so too did Amāī's heart remain riveted upon the Lord of Rukmiṇī.

Like the chakora bird that, though upon the earth, keeps its vision ever fixed upon the moon, so was her innermost being absorbed in Rukmiṇī's Lord. But by the decree of fate, her sons' merit reached its end, and their minds became lost in worldly attachment. This the Lord, the Protector of the helpless, well knew.

After some days had passed, one night while Amāī lay asleep, Viṭṭhoba appeared before her in a dream. His dark-blue form shone with splendor, the golden radiance of His yellow silken garment gleaming all around. Divine earrings, shaped like makaras, glistened upon His ears. Manifesting thus, the wielder of the discus spoke to her, saying, "By attachment to thy sons, thou hast set Me aside. Viśvambhara entrusted the care of the holy field to thee and then went to Vaikuṇṭha; but thou hast forgotten all this, turning thine eyes toward the pleasures of worldly life. Cast away the desire for wealth and possessions, and hasten now to Dehu-kṣetra."

As the Lord of Paṇḍharpur thus spoke, she awoke from sleep, her mind astonished. At once she called for Hari and Mukunda, and with a voice filled with emotion she told them the vision: "Your father entrusted the holy field to the care of the Lord Himself, who then returned to Vaikuṇṭha. This very night the Supreme Lord came to me and told me to rise and go to the banks of the Indrayani at Dehu without delay."

Hearing their mother's words, the sons laughed lightly and replied, "Why should we take a dream as the proof of truth? We are engaged in the service of our Master; thereby the Lord Rukmiṇī's consort is well-pleased. The Lord never disregards one who faithfully remains in his own righteous duty." Hearing such speech, Amāī remained outwardly calm, yet the bonds of affection would not loosen from her heart.

After four days had passed, her sons again, in playfulness, asked, "Mother, what message did the Lord of Paṇḍharpur speak to you?" Amāī answered, "On that occasion, there were yet two further visions. In them He commanded me to abandon entirely all offspring and possessions, and to set forth for Dehu without delay." But to her sons, such words carried no weight; they believed them not, for their minds had strayed, and the strange turning of fate had clouded their reason.

Another four days passed, and then the Lord Rukmiṇī's consort became deeply moved. To awaken faith in her, He granted Amāī a vision of great import. Appearing in her dream, the Lord of Paṇḍharpur said, "Thou art truly Mine, and I speak to thee in full truth: today, within two watches of the day, a fateful event shall occur. Hear this well, O Mother, and take heed within thine own heart."

As the Lord of the universe spoke, He declared to Amāī that her wealth and possessions would be scattered by the winds, and her sons would meet their end. Upon hearing this, she wept bitterly, crying, “If my sons are to die, O Lord, who will then lead me to the path of liberation?” Hari replied with gentle assurance, “I have taken upon Myself the debt that binds you; I shall surely repay it in full, without fail.”

Thus comforted for a moment, Amāī slipped into a strange dream-state, wherein she beheld such fearful scenes. Awakening suddenly, she saw her sons approach and inquire tenderly, “Mother, why do you weep?” She told them of the dream she had earlier shared, which they had dismissed as false. “But now,” she said, “Jagajjīvan Himself has appeared before my very eyes in a vision, and He was wroth.” She repeated His prophecy: “When two prahars of the day have passed, your lives will end; your wealth will be lost in an instant.”

Her sons, like Dhṛtarāṣṭra who would not believe Sanjaya’s foretellings, refused to take her words to heart. Just as the pious counsel of Mandodarī seemed untrue to Rāvaṇa, so did the warning appear unfounded to them. They reasoned that perhaps her old age had filled her mind with omens, and thus she spoke of ill fortune. Yet they said, “If indeed this is our last day, let us at least prepare a meal with our own hands and eat together.” At their command, the daughter-in-law served two platters of food, and the brothers sat, ate to their fill, and took betel to conclude the meal.

At that very moment, a messenger arrived, saying, “O warriors, a hostile force has entered your lands; your lord summons you at once.” Seeing the royal command, they swiftly readied themselves, informed their mother, and set out. Meeting the enemy in haste, a fierce battle broke out. Both brothers fought valiantly but were struck down in the fray, and in that instant, the foe plundered their army and wealth. As Hari and Mukunda lay fallen, they lamented, “We did not heed our mother’s warning, and thus has this come to pass.” In the grief of defeat, they turned their hearts toward Pāṇḍuraṅga, crying, “O Saviour of the fallen, O Lord of the gods, let us behold You without delay!”

Hearing their call, the Lord, full of compassion, granted them His vision at once. Seating them in His celestial chariot, He bore them to Vaikuṇṭha. For He had vowed to redeem their entire lineage, and thus the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha Himself received them.

Meanwhile, news reached Amāī that both her sons had perished in battle. A great sea of grief arose within her, as when Gāndhārī, hearing of her clan’s destruction, fell senseless upon the earth. In the same way, Amāī collapsed in anguish. Seeing her sorrow, Mukunda’s young wife lit the funeral fire without delay and, with steadfast heart, followed her husband in the rite of satī. The Lord met her at the journey’s end and brought her to Vaikuṇṭha, where, beholding her beloved before her eyes, she spoke to him in tender secrecy.

Amāī’s elder daughter-in-law, heavy with child, remained behind. But the enemy plundered all—garments, ornaments, wealth—and so Amāī fled with her to safety. As she went, she fixed her mind in remembrance of Hari. Reaching a shrine, she beheld the Bestower of

Liberation. Overcome with emotion, she clasped the deity to her breast, wrapped it close to her heart, and with tears flowing spoke thus: "O Lord, breaker of worldly delusion, well have You carried out the play of opposites! You have struck down my tender children in the field of battle and taken them into Your own abode. O Śrīhari, You destroy the very ones devoted to Your worship, casting them apart from Yourself as though across the ten directions. You lifted Śiva Himself, who sang Your praises, only to place him among the cremation grounds, giving him the wealth of renunciation so that worldly sights might no longer delight him. You brought the four sons of Brahmā—Sanaka and the others—to constant meditation, granting them the state beyond the body while still embodied, seating them in Vaikuṇṭha. You placed Nārada, foremost among Vaiṣṇavas, in poverty, giving him only a loincloth, so that he might wander the three worlds singing Your glory. You tested Rukmāṅgada, steadfast in his vow of keeping vigil on the Ekādaśī night, and at last brought him to Vaikuṇṭha with his city. You upheld Your devotee Vibhīṣaṇa after slaying his brother Rāvaṇa, gifting him the kingdom of Laṅkā, and thus displaying Your generosity. Yet again, You placed the noble Prahlāda in suffering, and in the end slew his own father—such are Your inscrutable ways.

"But enough of others' tales—now I speak from my own sight. In this very hour, O Infinite One, before my eyes You have slain my sons. O Wielder of the Discus, O Bearer of the forest-garland, turning the world to dust, You have drowned my little ones completely, only to bring them near to Yourself."

When Amāi lamented, "Now my service is at an end—who will perform it henceforth? Tell me quickly," the Lord of the Universe, hearing the grief of His devotee, drew her into the sanctuary of His heart and said with gentle assurance, "That which was destined has now come to pass. Let not your mind be troubled in the least, for I, the Elder of the world, am ever with you."

In many tender ways, full of compassion, He consoled her and gave her answers to calm her heart. What transpired thereafter in this sacred tale, listen, O devoted ones.

In the household there was need of wealth and grain to sustain the worldly duties, and there was none to provide them. The pregnant daughter-in-law of Amāi was therefore sent to her maternal home. Amāi herself remained in her holy dwelling at the sacred place, yet her mind found no peace; the sorrow that had befallen her had also impaired her eyesight, so that she could no longer see clearly.

At her door stood a drumstick tree which, sharing in her grief, withered completely. Then the Lord Sārangadhara, in His manifested form, spoke to her thus: "O mother, while I am present beside you, why do you give place to sorrow in your mind? How much must I tell you before you believe Me? I, who as Kṛṣṇa in another birth restored the dead son to his Guru, can in like manner restore your son—tell Me if that is what you wish at this moment."

As He spoke, the Lord, Husband of Rukmiṇī, offered to grant her divine sight. But Amāi replied with firm devotion, "I do not desire what is perishable. Do You forget, O Hari, the

vow You once made to me—that apart from You, I shall wish for nothing else? Keep that resolve alive in Your heart." She further declared, "Even if You were to grant it unasked, I would in no wise accept it." Hearing this, the compassionate Lord said, "Then consider Me your own son, and let Rukmiṇī be your cherished daughter-in-law. We will serve you with true affection and let nothing be wanting in your household."

But Amāi answered, "You, the Father of the universe, the Deliverer of all—how can You become my son?" To this the dark-hued Lord replied, "By the strength of loving devotion, I became the child of Yaśodā—do you not know this?" At these words from the wielder of the discus, Amāi fell full-length at His feet and said, "O Friend of devotees, Bestower of liberation, Your ways are wondrous beyond thought."

Out of pure love for her devotion, Śrī Hari took upon Himself the form of her son and entered the temple with her. Within, the Lord of the world allowed her to offer Him all the articles of worship, accepted food and drink from her hands daily, and left nothing lacking in her service. Blessed indeed was Amāi's devotion—though He is in truth beyond form, the Supreme Lord bore a bodily form and maintained the household without fail. He, who is the object of meditation for the sages Sanaka and others, who is worshipped even by the blue-throated Śiva, took this form only to repay the debt of His true servant.

Rukmiṇī, the primal Goddess, became Amāi's daughter-in-law, carrying out all household duties without the least deficiency. The Supreme Self, pure Consciousness, beyond Māyā and full of bliss, sat in her presence and partook of meals prepared with her loving care. Amāi, with simplicity, would say, "Vitho, eat as I serve You," and the Lord of Paṇḍharpur, affirming her request, would take the food with delight.

The same Lord who does not accept offerings from great sacrificial rites joyfully partook of the leavings of His devotee's plate. Enchanted by her love, He considered not the family nor the form of the devotee; according to the inner sentiment of each heart, so did Mūrāri appear to them.

Thus the meal would conclude, the Life of the worlds cleansing His hands and then preparing betel leaf with His own hands to give her. Holding Amāi gently by the hand, Garuḍadhvaja would walk slowly to her bedchamber, where Rukmiṇī would lay her to rest. The Lord, true to His own words in the Gītā, served His devotee without ceasing, even discarding His own divine majesty to sit at her feet and press them with His own hands.

Rukmiṇī would bathe her, comb her hair, and massage her back with loving care, the sole reason for all this being the power of her devotion. Many days passed thus, but the villagers knew nothing of it. Some thought a certain woman cared for Amāi; to others, Rukmiṇī appeared as a neighbour—but none knew the truth.

As time rolled on, the final moment drew near. It was the bright fortnight of Śrāvaṇa, on the sacred day of Hari, in the early morning watch. The dark-blue Lord came swiftly, seated

Amāi upon His lap, and in an instant drew her life-breath into a divine body. He then placed her upon a celestial chariot and bore her to the realm of Vaikuṇṭha.

To the villagers and kinsfolk, He appeared in the form of her son, gathered them together, performed her cremation rites, and Himself poured the libations of water. He carried out all the final ceremonies in due order, and on the thirteenth day served the memorial feast with His own hands.

At that time, in the town of Navlākh, Amāi's daughter-in-law, who was there, heard the news and was filled with sorrow. Formerly she had been with child, and now she came quickly with her young son to the village. She said to the people, "We were not here when it happened," but they replied, "It was you yourself who performed all the rites." Hearing this, the daughter-in-law was amazed.

Thus ends this episode of the Bhaktalīlāmṛta, composed by Śrī Mahīpati, the friend of the helpless and the Lord of Rukmiṇī, dwelling on the banks of the Bhīmā. This twenty-fifth chapter, sweet in its narration, fulfils the heart's desire of loving devotees.

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Chapter 26

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Lord Gaṇeśa)

All glory to Thee, O Dweller in the Ocean of Milk, who reclinest upon the serpent Śeṣa; O Beloved of Lakṣmī, O Enchanter of the mind, O Friend of the helpless, Treasure-house of mercy, Giver of life to the universe — Śrī Viṭṭhala! When Thy gracious glance falls upon a soul, the fetters of worldly bondage are instantly severed. Even as iron, when touched by the philosopher's stone, loses all its baseness and no longer retains its former stain, so too the soul, touched by Thy grace, is freed from every blemish. Or as in a place of utter darkness there suddenly appears a radiant lamp, dispelling the gloom and flooding every direction with resplendent light, so is the heart illumined when Thy mercy manifests. Again, as a foul and inauspicious stream, when suddenly met by the flooding waters of the sacred Gaṅgā, becomes itself pure and holy beyond measure, so does Thy compassion transform the most unworthy into vessels of sanctity.

Thus, by Thy merciful vision, the delusion of worldly existence vanishes in an instant; no fault remains in those who have taken exclusive refuge at Thy feet. The lowly, the degraded, the despised by society — women, śūdras, and others condemned by ritual law — all have been uplifted by Thee, O Lord of Lakṣmī. Hast Thou not saved the elephant Gajendra, the animal trapped in distress, and the despised frog from its plight? Seeing such as these in peril, Thou, O Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, hast drawn them to Thyself to enjoy the bliss of eternal union.

Even those condemned by the scriptures, if they sing Thy glories with love, are raised so high that the noble bow to them. Such is the greatness of Thy Name. Didst Thou not purify the sage Vālmīki, the great poet, who in turn described the noble deeds of the vānaras? By Thy grace, O Lotus-eyed Lord, his lineage was made holy. The cowherdess who drank buttermilk and was deemed inauspicious — she too was celebrated in the Bhāgavata by Vyāsa himself. That which is despised is made worthy of veneration when it comes in loving surrender unto Thee. How many countless devotees hast Thou delivered! Their number is beyond all reckoning. Therefore did the Lord of the Earth himself fall in love with Thee in full surrender.

In the previous chapter was told the tale of how Thou didst grant salvation to Amāi. When one hears that story, the mind is filled with wonder. Viṭhobā was her true son. Once He spake unto His mother, saying, "How hast thou come to think thus, when I Myself was not even present?"

Even if she wished to deny it, the people of the village could testify that they had eaten and drunk in that very place, and all their words would confirm it. Hearing her son's clear reply, the mother answered, "Indeed, this quarrel between us seems to be rooted in Rukmiṇī Herself. Thy grandfather, the Sustainer of the worlds, worshipped Rukmiṇī's Lord, and for the sake of His devotion, the Lord appeared before him in His full, visible form.

His name was Hari Mukunda, and he had two sons, both of whom served the king and thus amassed wealth and prosperity. We two — myself and my mother-in-law Amāi — were living there together, until one day we were sent back to our native home. After some days, as she dwelt there, Paṇḍhari-nātha came to her in a dream and declared, 'Thy death shall come to pass this very day.'

When no one came forward to protect her, both her sons perished in battle. Thus we, the two widowed daughters-in-law, fled in fear to this place. In her grief, Amāi wept bitterly and quarrelled with Pāṇḍuraṅga. Then the Lord Himself, assuming His own true form, came forth and repaid her debt.

Hearing his mother's words, Viṭhobā was stirred with anger. Bathing swiftly, He hastened toward the temple. Standing before the Lord, He cried, "Thou hast brought ruin upon us, O Viṭṭhala! My grandfather fell in Thy service, my father was slain in battle — such is the fame Thou hast given us in this world. I will no longer abide with Thee."

Speaking thus, He took a weapon in His hand, as though to tear open His own breast. Then Śrī Sārangadhara restrained His arm. Viṭhobā said, "Hold, O Hari! I am Thy master at this moment. I have heard of Thy fame throughout the worlds. Hast Thou not slain Thy own dear devotee Prahlāda's father, revealing Thyself from a pillar? Didst Thou not kill Vāli, father of Aṅgada, though he was innocent, and yet by Thy charm win him as Thy servant?

Even so, I am certain that Thou hast slain my father, O Lord of Rukmiṇī. I will not live any longer — life holds no worth for me now." Beholding his resolve, the Ocean of Compassion melted with pity, and embracing Him tenderly, wiped His eyes with His own hand.

"Why dost thou labour in vain, my child?" said the Lord. "That which was to be, has already come to pass. This is but the sport of the Vaiṣṇava Māyā. Thy grandfather Viśvambhara was in My debt for his food; to repay that debt I remained in Dehu village. I am the protector of devotees, Sārangadhara, yet thou callest Me an adversary! Shall one liken nectar to poison?

If a radiant moon-calf appears, would one call it Rāhu? If one beholds the Ocean of Milk, shall one offer a petty comparison from mortal life? The aśvattha tree is a mighty portion of Viṣṇu; its very sight frees one from the bondage of worldly life, yet the ignorant call it by low names. Śiva, the Lord of yogis and the indweller of the cremation ground, is called 'ghost' by those who know not his greatness.

Even so, I, who wield the mace and discus in protection of My devotees, am called 'opponent' by thee! I am indebted to thy family's service. Now take this blessed food from Me." Thus speaking, the Discus-bearer fell at Viṭhobā's feet. By His own grace, the dark-blue Lord showed him the ninefold path of devotion.

Mother and son, united in tender love, thenceforth ever engaged in His worship. Forgetting all former sorrows, they regularly journeyed to Paṇḍharpur. The Lord Himself took charge of their welfare, guiding their steps in all matters, both worldly and spiritual.

That Viṭhobā had a son named Padājī, who bore his name with pride. Padājī too, with heartfelt devotion, worshipped the Lord, the Beloved of Rukmiṇī. Padājī's son was named Śaṅkara, and he too adored Rukmiṇī's Lord. Śaṅkara's son was Bolhobā, and to Bolhobā was born a son — the great Vaiṣṇava devotee, Tukārām. O loving devotees, hear with affection the account of his life in its proper order.

Bolhobā, though harbouring certain worldly desires in his heart, yet served Pāṇḍuraṅga with sincere devotion, praying, "O Lord of Lords, Beloved of Rukmiṇī, fulfil the longing of my heart." You may ask what manner of devotion Bolhobā practised, and by what merits he obtained the Lord's direct vision — this, dear devotees, I shall now narrate in full, according to my ability.

With loving absorption, Bolhobā would daily engage in solitary worship. Without fail he undertook the pilgrimages to Paṇḍharpur during the Āṣāḍhī and Kārtikī festivals. He fed the hungry, gave water to the thirsty, and honoured sādhus, saints, and Vaiṣṇava devotees. In all his dealings with the world, he never spoke a false word. In every being he perceived the same Self; he saw no duality anywhere.

Such were the sāttvic austerities he practised, yet in the innermost chamber of his heart there abode one cherished desire. "O Beloved of Rukmiṇī, Life of the universe, Ocean of Mercy — Śrī Viṭṭhala," he prayed, "Thou who hast in the past fulfilled the heart's longings of the destitute who sought refuge in Thee, and whose glories are proclaimed in the Purāṇas throughout the three worlds — Thou who grantest to each according to his heart's wish — so may Thy fame, O Compassionate Lord, be fulfilled also in me."

"Was it not Thou," he recalled, "who granted to the boy Upamanyu, when he begged for a mere bowl of milk, the seat upon the Ocean of Milk itself? Didst Thou not grant to the innocent child Dhruva, who desired the sovereignty of a kingdom, the unshakable throne of the Pole Star? And did not all the hosts of the moon, the sun, and the stars circle about him in worship? Thy generosity, O Śrī Hari, cannot be measured by human speech; even if it could be weighed, no reckoner could complete the tally."

Thus day after day, Bolhobā entreated the Beloved of Rukmiṇī with single-minded devotion, observing the Harijagar and Ekādaśī vows with heartfelt love. For twenty-four years without fail, he made the pilgrimage to Paṇḍharpur. At last, Śrī Hari was pleased — and how this came to be, listen now.

Bolhobā's wife, Kanakāī, was herself a most devoted and virtuous woman. She prayed, "O Lord of Lords, Beloved of Rukmiṇī, fulfil our yearning in this hour of distress." Thus husband and wife, united in one mind, lived in deep devotion, until one night the Three Gods appeared to them in a dream and granted them vision.

Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and the Bull-bannered Śiva said, "We are pleased with you. Ask freely whatever boon you desire, and it shall be granted today." Bolhobā, rousing his mind to alertness, bowed to the Three Forms and said, "In this worldly life I desire a son — such is

my wish in this hour." Śiva and Brahmā replied, "Your wish shall be fulfilled." Then the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha asked, "In what manner shall I grant you a son?"

Bolhobā answered, "O Deliverer of the world, O true Vaiṣṇava, grant me a son who will sing Thy glories, that he may be my treasure of joy." "Seeing the love of Dāmaśeṭ and Guṇābāī, I gave them a son named Nāmā; even so, O Supreme Person, fulfil my desire in the same manner."

The Lord, full of love, assured him, "Surely, O beloved devotee, your wish shall be fulfilled — hold this firmly in your heart. You shall behold with your own eyes the crown-jewel of all saints as your son." Circumambulating the Lord and bowing in full prostration, Bolhobā received this divine promise.

When such a vision ended, Bolhobā awoke and, gathering himself, told Kanakāī the whole account. In a short time, the couple beheld the joy of a son in their home. Kanakāī, being with child, gave birth in due season. The boon-bestowing Lord Śiva had given them this son, and they named him Sāvjī. In time, his life would unfold in marvellous ways, as shall be told further in the spirit of true Vaiṣṇava devotion.

Meanwhile, Once, in the celestial realm of Vaikuntha, the Supreme Lord Shri Hari was seated amidst a great assembly of saints, sages, and pure-hearted devotees. Around Him gathered the sanctified hosts — their hearts immersed in bliss, their eyes fixed upon the lotus of His countenance, rejoicing as though in a divine festival. To hear even the mere utterance of their sacred names was enough to dispel ignorance and delusion from the heart.

There were present Sanaka and his brothers, Narada, Tumburu, Prahlada, Dhruva, and Akrura; Uddhava, Ambarisha, and valiant Vaishnavas; Shuka, the great yogi, and King Parikshit. Bhishma and Rukmangada, Pundalik — the very treasure-house of devotion — and the noble saints Nivritti, Jnanadeva, Sopan, and Muktabai, shining as repositories of Vaishnava love. Nama, Kabir, Bhanudas, Changa, Vateshwar, Savata Mali, Narahari the goldsmith, Visoba Khechar, and Eknath. Senanai, Chokhamela, Gora the potter, all tender in their love, who through ceaseless devotion had bound the Lord of Vaikuntha to themselves. Banka, Bahira Pisha, King Janaka, Parasa, Tulsidas, and the virtuous Kamal — beloved of the Vaikuntha-lord. Kanhopatra, Surdas, and the four sons of Namdev; Narsi Mehta, jewel among saints, nourished on the milk of detachment. Ramdas, Ramananda Swami, Joga, Rohidas, Siddhanath the great, and Vishwambhar, king of devotees.

Chaitanya, Raghav Chaitanya, Amabai, Gonai, Rajai, Girabai, Janabai, and Kanhopatra — all these noble souls formed the radiant circle. In their midst sat the garland-bearing Lord, shining like the moon among the constellations, as Meru among mountains, as Anasuya among the women of virtue, as Shiva among ascetics. All beauty in the universe had its source in Him, and the poet's tongue faltered in finding His equal.

Thus, the matchless Shri Hari — the wish-fulfilling tree of His devotees — spoke with tender love to those who were His very life. Addressing the loving and faithful devotee

Vishwambhar, He declared, “O my beloved, I shall grant you a son — the world’s deliverer and teacher of all mankind.” Wondering whom He might send, the Lord, the bearer of the Saranga bow, questioned the assembled devotees, who burst into joyful acclamation.

Then, from among all the saints, the crown of the assembly, Namdev himself, was brought before the Lord of life. Taking him aside, Shri Hari spoke: “Namya, for your sake I shall take birth in every age, to restore righteousness and to destroy the wicked. You too shall descend to the mortal world, worship Me with love, uplift the humble, and teach the way of devotion. Proclaim the supremacy of bhakti above even the four kinds of liberation, as spoken in the Gita and the Bhagavata. You had once vowed to offer a hundred crores of books in My praise — what remains unfinished, now you shall complete. Extract and expound the profound essence of the Word-Brahman for the hungry seekers, as one serves a meal with loving care. Give the Name of Hari as water to the parched, the nectar of bhakti to all beings, and I shall grant liberation as your companion.”

The Lord continued, “In the realm where liberation itself resides, wealth and powers will come to you unasked, though your heart will not cling to them; yet they will serve the needs of My people. Now go to the mortal world, spread My glory, and let your love for Me grow tenfold.” With such words of blessing, the Lord of Lakshmi spoke to Namdev.

Namdev, with joined palms, asked humbly, “In what lineage should I take birth, O Lord, so that it be sanctified by devotion to You?” Shri Hari replied, “I shall tell you of one who has worshipped Me with steadfast devotion — My dear Vishwambhar Das, who now dwells in Vaikuntha. With loving effort he brought Me to his village through kirtan and pilgrimage to Pandharpur, and I was pleased with his offering. In his family there is Bolhoba, a pure-hearted devotee, who prayed for a son devoted to Me — a world-teacher for the welfare of all. To fulfil that boon, you shall be born there.”

Thus resolved, Namdev bowed and prepared to descend to earth. As he entered the mortal realm, the heavens shone, and people marvelled, wondering if Swati’s star had dropped its pearl into the womb of Kanakai. Into that womb fell the drop of Namdev’s love, and from it was born the pearl named Tukaram, the beloved devotee of Hari. Through earnest practice of the ninefold path of bhakti, he attained its perfect culmination, and thus the fortune of Kanakai was immeasurable, for within her was born a devotee of Vishnu.

Kanakai, in the fullness of her expectancy, began to feel the burdens of worldly life pressing upon her. In the quiet recesses of her heart, she thought, “It would be well to withdraw into solitude, to dwell in a place apart and devote myself wholly to the remembrance of Shri Hari.”

One day, when the appointed time drew near, Kanakai sat alone within the temple. Suddenly, there fell upon her an indescribable radiance—like the first splendour of the rising sun. As she gazed upon the face of her yet-unborn child in the mind’s eye, there appeared before her a form of ineffable brilliance. It was as though she beheld the tender shoot of

peace and bliss, or else the embodied image of perfect renunciation. Was it the very treasure-house of devotion now made manifest? Was it the form of the eternal Sat-Chit-Ananda? Or was it the hidden store of divine love, suddenly thrown open before her eyes?

Kanakai's heart stood still in wonder, and for four whole hours she remained as one absorbed—utterly speechless, freed of desire and ego. Immersed in that ocean of self-born joy, she lost all bodily awareness, and this was indeed a marvel beyond measure.

When at last the vision unfolded fully, she saw before her a child—yet not a mere child, but a true devotee of Vishnu. In that instant there descended upon her the awakening of divine power; her own being became one with the radiance of that form, and her mind was filled with bliss. Within her closed heart there appeared the living form of Panduranga, who spoke gently to the child in secret: "Live in the world as others do; carry out the duties of common life in the sight of all. But in the end, cultivate within yourself discernment, detachment, and love for the Lord."

Having uttered these words, the dark-blue Lord seemed suddenly to vanish into the play of divine illusion. Kanakai, opening her eyes, found before her only the child, as though the vision had been but a dream. At that moment, her neighbours arrived and said, "Kanakai, someone has been born to you." She replied simply, "By the grace of Pandharinath, my heart's desire has been fulfilled."

Twelve days passed, and Kanakai, now purified, hastened to the temple. There, in the presence of Rukmini's deity, she placed the infant at the feet of Panduranga, saying, "This servant of Yours, O Lord of the Serpent Couch, I now dedicate to You," and marked the child with holy ash. Hearing these words, the Lord of Vaikuntha spoke to Rukmini: "Lift the child in your own hands."

Rukmini, taking the form of a beautiful woman, received the infant tenderly and placed it in Kanakai's lap. Kanakai entreated her, "O Divine Mother, give the child a name this very day." Rukmini, pleased with the devotion of Bolhoba, consented at once; for the Lord, too, was gladdened by the sincere love of His devotee, and thus blessed the family with both progeny and prosperity.

Wherever the child of Rukmini was brought, there blessings and fulfilment abounded. Gathering the married women, Rukmini placed the child in a cradle, and with turmeric and vermilion adorned herself for the joyous ceremony. As she rocked the cradle, she sang softly, revealing deep mysteries: "This is He who is beyond all syllables, beyond name and form; who is joy beyond the reach of speech. Here He lies, sleeping. This is the realm where all duality and non-duality dissolve, where speech finds no footing—here lies the child. This is the state where knower, knowing, and known are no more; where there is no cause for any triad—here lies the child. This is the supreme state spoken of by the saints, the causeless, eternal abode; here lies the child, resting in bliss. Though unknowable and unmanifest, He

takes a form for the sake of His devotees, and in the presence of His lotus feet, love awakens and abides."

In this way, the Mother of the Universe sang the cradle song, while the women gathered around, joyfully rocking the infant. Then, asking Kanakai, she named the child Tukaram—he whose name would one day bring salvation to countless bound souls.

With gifts of leaves, sweets, and trinkets, the women departed, and Rukmini returned to the temple. In time, the child played, crawled, and grew, learning to take his first steps. Later, Kanakai again conceived and bore another son, who was named Kanhaiya. Thus, Bolhoba and Kanakai had three sons—Savji, Tukaram, and Kanhaiya.

Bolhoba often recalled the marvels shown him by Panduranga, saying, "The three gods themselves once appeared to me in a dream. This was no false vision—it has come to pass exactly so." Blessed by the Lord, he was granted abundance of wealth, progeny, and all auspiciousness—the fruit of meritorious deeds from past lives. Truly, their good fortune was beyond description, for the three deities had themselves given sons destined for the upliftment of the world.

As the days passed, the sons grew in stature and virtue, bringing joy to the eyes of their parents. Their prosperity attracted many well-wishers, and soon learned brahmins proposed marriages for them. With liberal expenditure, the weddings were celebrated with due propriety, and Kanakai's heart overflowed with joy.

Surrounded by sons, daughters-in-law, wealth, and honour, she enjoyed the complete fortune of a devoted householder's life. All endeavours prospered, for the Lord Himself ensured that nothing was lacking. Yet, having fulfilled their worldly duties, they attained the highest spiritual goal; for where the sense of "I am the doer" is absent, there alone is the true mark of renunciation.

Saintly souls and ordinary people alike live amidst the affairs of the world, yet their experience of it is entirely different. This difference must be understood with attentive reflection. The ignorant say that destiny is like a lame servant—it bears fruit only when supported by personal effort. Thinking themselves skilled in worldly affairs at all times, they never let go of their restless striving. But destiny often unfolds of its own accord, and when a man is bound by the ego of "I am the doer," the highest liberation of union with God slips away, and he continues to wander through the cycle of birth in countless wombs.

The wise too live amidst worldly life, yet they say that the one true doer is Lord Shri Hari. He holds the ancient thread of destiny in His hands and makes the soul experience what is ordained. From the store of past actions, whatever is to come will surely come—truth never fails. In this way the wise conduct themselves, and such a one is called liberated while still in the body.

Such was the state of Bolhoba. The thought "I am the doer" never arose in his heart, and thus, even in worldly dealings, he was joined in the supreme way to the Lord of Rukmini. Like the lotus leaf that rests upon the water yet is never truly wetted by it, or like the reflection of a beautiful face that appears in the mirror without the mirror itself desiring it, so does the Vaishnava devotee live amidst the illusions of the world—carrying on all household affairs while his mind remains absorbed in the Beloved Lord of Rukmini.

In this manner Bolhoba's days passed until old age arrived. Then he called his eldest son, Savji, to his side and said, "Now that my body has grown old, and you are the eldest and wise, take charge of the family affairs. Manage all matters of giving and receiving with care." Savji, hearing his father's clear and firm words, bowed to his feet. He said, "Father, I have never been drawn into worldly entanglements; my mind now yearns for pilgrimage and the renunciate's path. But because you, my parents, were yet living, I remained at home. It would go against the scriptures and against social custom to leave you."

Seeing the dispassionate state of his son's mind, Bolhoba remained inwardly still. "The course of events will be as destiny has written; who knows what lies in the store of past actions?" he thought. Then he remembered that this son had been given to him by the boon of Lord Shankara, the Lord who dwells in the cremation ground, bearing the bow Pinaka. Just as the moon grants coolness to those who worship it, and the sun grants intense heat, so too does the Lord give to each devotee according to their nature. Thus did Vrishabhadhvaja, the Bull-bannered Lord, grant this son—a gift not meant for the labors of worldly affairs, as Bolhoba understood in his heart.

Having thus resolved, he remained serene, and with affection he called Tukaram, entrusting to him the care of household duties. "Conduct all matters of trade and dealings with attention to profit and loss, so that in the end it may bring true benefit," he advised. Tukaram, hearing his father's words, accepted them wholeheartedly. Being skilled in the Vaishya's calling, he managed all family matters with diligence. Relatives, friends, and acquaintances praised him as the able son of Bolhoba, for he ordered the household with care.

His son obeyed his father's commands, his wife was virtuous and devoted, and Bolhoba knew this to be the fruit of past penance. His elder son Savji was a great soul, yet Tukaram appeared the abler householder, though still young in years. Seeing such harmony, the relatives rejoiced, and Bolhoba's mind was satisfied, as a king is pleased upon hearing of his chief minister's virtue, or as parents delight in the virtues of their daughter, or as a guru rejoices in the wisdom of his disciple.

Tukaram was already married, yet his first wife was frail in health, and so his parents thought to arrange another marriage. In Pune there was a wealthy merchant, Apaji Gulavya, whose daughter was noble in character. With her, Tukaram entered into a second marriage. Thus he had two wives, and with their help he maintained the household well, to the great contentment of his parents.

His parents, brothers, and kinsfolk—all were bound to him with affection. Through Tukaram, the family's wealth, honor, and repute suffered no want.

This sacred story, known as the Bhaktalilamrit, belongs to the ancient and holy place of Pandharpur. Here dwells the spirit of devotion in the form of Pundalik, and here flows the serene confluence of the Bhima and Chandrabhaga rivers, bringing peace, detachment, and inward calm. The loving devotees, ever steadfast, dwell here joyfully. Out of love, Pundalik offered a brick for the Lord to stand upon; and upon it, with one hand on His hip, the Lord of Vaikuntha stands, giving His devotees the embrace of His compassionate gaze.

Here I, though dull-witted and ignorant, came for His darshan. Tulsi leaves, tender and fresh, I offered into His hands with loving feeling. The sovereign Lord ever remains near, the lotus of His feet fixed in the devotee's vision.

Thus concludes the twenty-sixth chapter of this nectar-like Bhaktalilamrit, which fulfills the heart's desire by the mere act of hearing, flowing sweetly like love into the ears of faithful devotees.

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Chapter 27

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Lord Gaṇeśa)

All glory to Thee, O embodiment of Sat–Cit–Ānanda, Supreme and Eternal Brahman! Thy holy fame is boundless. The Vedas themselves, having tried to describe Thy greatness, have grown weary; the intellects of the scriptures have been silenced. O Lord of all gods, when sages and divine beings speak of Thy marvellous deeds, even the keen eye and attentive ear become overwhelmed. How, then, can we—beings born in this dark age—fully recount or comprehend them? Just as a small child utters broken and incoherent words, yet its mother listens with joy and lovingly verifies the meaning, so too, O Lord of Rukmiṇī, when Thy devotees offer Thee praise—even in imperfect words—they become sweet to Thee, for they are strengthened by the power of love and devotion. The wisdom of the Vedas may grow mute before Thee, but the simple garland of love offered by a cowherd devotee binds Thee completely. O World-Saviour, O Preceptor of the universe, before such love Thou set aside Thy majesty and speak without reservation. To attain the vision of Thee, the great sages perform lofty sacrifices; yet Thou dost also gladly eat the leftover berries offered with devotion by a lowly Bhillī woman. Is this not a wonder? Thou art verily the Father of Brahmā, yet in Vraja Thou dost call Thyself the son of Yaśodā. Ever resting upon her lap, Thou art ever free from indolence. Thou didst not honour mighty Duryodhana, sovereign of the earth; yet Thou didst seek out the humble home of Vidura, the son of a maidservant and Thy steadfast devotee. Beholding the deep love of the cowherds, Thou didst relish their leftover food, and even from a feast of delicacies Thou didst desire instead the stem of a simple vegetable. In this very manner, O Ocean of Compassion, Thou dost accept the heartfelt words of saints, cherishing their remembrance in Thy heart and proclaiming their virtues.

At the close of the previous chapter, Tukā was freed from the endless wheel of worldly life. In his vision he saw clearly the calling of the Vaiśya's trade, and with contentment in his heart he revered the path of his forefathers. His home was blessed with mother, father, brothers, good friends, abundant wealth and grain, health in the body, and honour in the world—there was not the least want of anything. Yet in such a season of ease, his mind became absorbed in worldly concerns; and suddenly, events turned in the opposite direction, as you shall hear now, O loving devotees.

For in this world, joy is ever followed by sorrow—this is the eternal order established from time without beginning. Just as the setting sun is followed by darkness, or as abundance of grain is sometimes followed by famine, so too sorrow follows prosperity. Where there is deep friendship, division may arise; where there is much honour, slander may spring forth. When the body is pampered for pleasure, disease appears; when nectar is churned from the ocean, poison also emerges. So it happened with Tukā. In the midst of his worldly happiness, the threefold miseries arose within his mind, as you shall hear. When the span of their lives was complete, his mother and father attained Vaikuṇṭha. Yet Tukā, secure in detachment, felt no sorrow in his heart. But his brothers and sisters grieved deeply, and seeing their grief

increased the pain within him. “The burden of this household now rests upon my head—how shall I bear it?” he thought. As such thoughts troubled him, his mind also sought to give itself courage: “What was destined has now come to pass—there is no other way.”

Yet even as he steadied his heart, his elder brother Sāvjī’s wife passed away, and this too wounded him inwardly. Sāvjī had long been weary of worldly life, feeling its troubles keenly; the bond of his wife’s presence was now suddenly severed. Filled with deep repentance, he set forth on pilgrimage, ever chanting the nectarous life-giving Holy Name. He visited the seven sacred cities and the twelve jyotirliṅgas, and in due course Pushkara and other holy places, crossing the difficult ocean of worldly life. Through natural discipline of body, speech, and mind, he overcame the six enemies of the soul, attaining peace and bliss. Having completed his pilgrimages, he returned to Ānanda–vana and dwelt among saints, engaging in varied practices of self-realisation. Established fully in the Self, he rested in contentment with his own true nature.

Meanwhile, Tukā—ever a true Vaiṣṇava—lamented daily: “My parents have certainly departed, and now my brother’s fate too has been sealed. If only his wife were still alive, perhaps he might return someday. Yet he was already detached in heart; now this chance has gone forever.”

Thus he prayed: “O Lord of Rukmiṇī, O Paṇḍharīnātha, while my parents lived I had not a single care. But now, what am I to do?”

His father’s great wealth had vanished like clouds dispersing in the cold season, or like tender grass withering in the heat, or like a rainbow disappearing the moment it is beheld, or like waves that never endure. In the same way, Tukā’s wealth and grain were utterly gone, and he pondered anxiously, “How shall I overcome this plight?”

He would not speak falsely nor claim another’s property. No effort seemed to avail in the least. Yet, loving his family, he strove in many ways to secure their needs, going even to the market to sell goods. But in all this, his lips never ceased to utter the holy Name of Hari, and he would not resort to false trade.

“If I owe a man, I must repay him,” he thought, “for false dealings bring great sin. Whatever the customer asks in fairness, I must give exactly that.”

Filled with compassion for all beings, he never spoke an untruth, and without pause his lips uttered the remembrance of Hari, never trusting the mind to rest even for a single moment. Beholding such a state of affairs, it seemed as though the Lord Himself was testing Tukā. Even in trade, there was no provision sufficient for his needs, and so he sought other means. He engaged in various forms of a merchant’s occupation, but nowhere did Śrī Hari grant success. The mind became heavy with distress, yet still he persevered. Day and night he laboured, loading sacks upon bullocks, bearing heat, cold, sleeplessness, and weariness—never allowing any of these to turn his mind away from remembrance of the Lord. At times he took on more loans and attempted greater business ventures, but not the least profit

came, which only deepened his anxiety. Again he borrowed money to try some small gain, but no opportunity arose. “O Viṭhobā, what am I to do now?” he cried within.

Though his heart was ever engaged in remembrance, the debts mounted. Once, upon returning home and calculating the accounts, he found the burden even greater than before. At such times, malicious tongues among his kin whispered, “He has gone bankrupt,” and the moneylenders would come and sit at his very door, filling his eyes with tears.

Then, turning to the Lord of Rukmiṇī, he lamented, “O Lord of all gods, how hast Thou turned events so unfavourably? How shall I maintain this worldly life now?” In such an hour, friends and relatives came forward—some offering to act as guarantors, that he might incur further debt; others, showing their supposed prestige, drew loans in his name, thereby disgracing him further.

They spoke with biting words: “You have become an ascetic, chanting the Holy Name day and night; see now what has come of it—you have been shamed in worldly affairs. Even our fathers said no one prospers by devotion to Viṣṇu; you can see the truth of it yourself. You do not know the ways of the world, yet you spend all your time in chanting. This will only lead to a beggar’s lot. We speak for your good, though it angers us inwardly. Were you to sing only in our temple, your debts would grow still greater.”

Speaking thus, they departed to their own homes, leaving him at his door to grieve, “What shall I do in this worldly life?” In the house, his wife spoke many harsh words, while outside, slanderers mocked openly—but his resolve in heart did not waver.

In that very moment, with loving devotion, his tongue became absorbed in the remembrance of the Name, and though the lady of the house lamented his going out for work, he set forth. Four bullocks he had in his care; when sickness struck them, three died. Seeing this, he thought, “O Beloved of Rukmiṇī, wilt Thou now abandon my devotion?” Yet instead of lessening, his devotion only grew, and with love he cried aloud in song.

His companions complained, “This man’s troubles have fallen upon us as well. He knows no time or place—he babbles constantly. He never sleeps; his restlessness disturbs our peace.” Resolving to part from him, they all went ahead on the road, leaving the Vaiṣṇava alone in the wilderness.

Night had fallen; an hour had passed when the sack upon the bullock slipped to the ground. “Now who will lift it for me?” he thought in dismay. Clouds gathered and thundered above; the rain-wind swirled dust into his eyes; lightning flashed across the sky; showers poured down.

The forest became a fearful place, filled with the cries of wild beasts, while the heavy rain troubled Tukā inwardly. “This worldly life is like a demon that has taken hold of my back, bringing me to great misery—who can I tell of it? My parents have left me, my brother has taken to renunciation, my wealth has been destroyed, and in this the world counts me

disgraced. Those who once honoured me now mock me openly; there is no food in the house. My companions have gone—who will lift this sack? O Lord of gods, wielder of the discus, apart from Thee there is no one! My parents, my kin, my uncle—all are gone; Thou alone art my Paṇḍhari–nātha. Let my life end now, O Infinite One, take me quickly!

Save for Thee, O Friend of the helpless, there is no dear one or noble soul for me—just as an infant without understanding has none but its mother, so I have none but Thee. My strength and wit are spent; thus do I turn my thought to Thee. If Thou, O Ocean of Mercy, dost not protect me, the wicked will laugh everywhere."

Thus speaking, the loving devotee wept tears, praying, "O Viṭṭhābāī, Protector of the orphan, guard this poor wretch." Hearing this heartfelt cry, the Lord, assuming the form of a traveller upon the road, came at once to Tukā, wiped his tears, and asked, "Why art thou sitting here in the middle of the night, blocking the path?"

When the Lord thus questioned him, Tukā replied, "I am a trader by calling; this sack has fallen here, and there is no one to lift it—my companions have all gone ahead."

Hearing Tukā's words, what did the Bearer of the Śārṅga bow do? He put His own hand to the task and quickly heaved the sack upon the bullock. The Vaiṣṇava's heart rejoiced, but the darkness hid the path. The traveller then said, "Come quickly, walk behind Me."

Following the mysterious traveller's words, Tukā walked behind Him through the darkness. The forest path, though hidden to the eye, now seemed clear under His guidance. The roar of beasts faded, the storm seemed gentler, and the burden upon Tukā's heart lightened with each step.

In silence they journeyed until, in what felt like but a few moments, the path opened before them into familiar ground. Then the traveller, with a smile of quiet grace, said, "Here is thy road, O friend. Go in peace." Before Tukā could utter words of gratitude, He vanished into the night as suddenly as He had appeared.

A wave of realisation swept over Tukā's heart—this was no mere traveller, but the very Lord Viṭṭhala, the Beloved of Rukmiṇī, who had come in disguise to lift not only his fallen sack but the crushing weight of his worldly despair. His eyes brimmed with tears, his body trembled, and his voice choked as he fell to the ground in reverence.

"O Anāthanātha, O Compassionate One," he cried, "Thou who rulest the three worlds, yet carest for Thy servant's petty trade—how can I ever repay such grace? In the wilderness of life, when all had abandoned me, Thou alone didst come, bearing my burden upon Thy own hands."

From that night onwards, Tukā's mind grew even more steadfast in devotion. Worldly poverty could no longer dishearten him, for he had seen with his own eyes that the Lord walks with His servant, even upon the roughest and most deserted paths. Though the storms of slander and scarcity still came, they could no longer shake the deep inner joy that the

Lord's touch had planted in his heart. To others, he would say only this: "In all trials, remember Him alone. When none remain, He will come—He will come indeed, even in the guise of a simple traveller—to lead you home."

The Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga, ever mindful of His true devotees, swiftly showed Tukā the way forward. Yet, by the mysterious play of divine Māyā, a doubt was sown in Tukā's mind, and he could not clearly perceive the truth before him.

Nevertheless, the dark, cloud-hued figure walked ahead, steadily guiding the path, while the loving devotee followed behind. Soon they reached the banks of the River Indrayani, only to find her waters swollen and raging in flood.

A new anxiety stirred in Tukā's heart. "How shall I carry this sack across?" he wondered. But the Supreme Giver of Liberation, smiling gently, said, "I will see to it; wait here." Then, with a touch of divine play, the Sustainer of the worlds placed His own Sudarśana beneath the waters, creating a safe passage.

"Mādhu-sūdana" He declared to Tukā, "there is no need for you to lift the sack." Thus speaking, He moved forward with serene composure, the sack still resting upon the bullock, while the noble Vaishnava stranger walked alongside.

Amazed, Tukā's heart whispered, "Surely the Lord Himself has sent me this traveller! Without him, how would I ever have managed such a burden?"

Even as these thoughts swirled, a wondrous sight unfolded. A flash of lightning split the heavens, and in that brief illumination, Tukā beheld the traveller's form transformed into that of the four-armed Lord Himself. There He stood, adorned in a divine yellow robe, the Kaustubha jewel gleaming upon His chest, the Vaijayantī garland resting on His neck. His dark, radiant form was anointed with sandal paste; the Śrīvatsa mark shone resplendent, and upon His head glittered a crown set with precious gems. Celestial earrings sparkled by His ears, and His smile revealed teeth like flawless pearls. Anklets chimed softly at His feet, and Tukā's heart was overcome with wonder.

For a fleeting moment, by the brilliance of the lightning, Tukā gazed upon the very ocean of beauty and bliss. Yet, as a flame's light fades or as sweetness mingles with nectar, so too did the vision pass, leaving only the sweet ache of its memory. It was as though a seeker, distracted by false company, fails to find peace; so too, the brilliance of the lightning allowed but a glimpse, not a lingering sight, of the Lord's form. Still, the Lord, seeing Tukā's unwavering devotion, had revealed Himself in this sudden, wondrous way.

Tukā understood—had the Lord stood openly before him for long, his mortal frame could scarcely have borne it. Thus, after granting the vision, the Lord resumed His role as the humble traveller, walking ahead in quiet grace. Together they reached Tukā's home. Someone there helped unload the sack from the bullock, while Tukā busied himself with

tending the cattle. Taking advantage of this moment, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, the friend of His devotee, departed unseen.

At dawn, word spread through the village that Tukā had returned from his trade. Yet trouble brewed—three of his four bullocks had died, and the gossips, moneylenders, and ill-wishers descended upon his home like crows upon a carcass.

The worldly-minded mocked and accused him, recalling other tales of his misfortune, comparing him to kings like Hariścandra and Nala who had endured great trials while keeping faith in the Lord. Some said he was shameless, that he cared nothing for worldly honour, and that his constant chanting of the Lord's Name had brought him nothing but ruin.

When they left, Tukā's heart felt the weight of both spiritual longing and worldly suffering. "O Vithṭhā Māuli," he prayed, "when will You free me from this snare of worldly life? How is it that Your mercy does not yet descend?"

In time, famine struck; the rains failed, hunger spread, and the people suffered grievously. Tukā resolved to try once more to earn something for sustenance. With what little capital he had left, he purchased three sacks of chillies and set out towards the Konkan to sell them.

As he walked, the sound of the Lord's Holy Name rose naturally from his lips, and in his heart he saw the beautiful, saguna form of the Lord again and again. Though engaged in trade, his mind was fixed entirely upon Pāṇḍuraṅga.

Reaching a coastal village, he stopped outside the settlement near a great Śiva temple shaded by banyan and pipal trees. There he carefully unloaded his sacks, tying them securely, and set up his small stall. Even then, the form of Pāṇḍuraṅga remained seated in his heart, and the thought of worldly profit could not take root within him.

Villagers came and went, asking the price of his goods. One man inquired who had sent him and why he had brought his wares here. Hearing this, a fellow Vaishnava explained, "Do you not know him? Whatever is needed, take it without delay. He harbours no hesitation in his heart."

One day, a devotee brought a measure of rice, which Tukaram promptly counted with care. According to the exact account, the steadfast Vaishnava weighed it out truthfully. Yet some present suggested to the recipient that he might take it with his own hands, without hesitation. At first, he reached hesitantly, fearing perhaps that the grain might prickle his fingers. Tukaram, however, paid no mind to such trivialities, for to him the body itself was of little consequence compared to the spirit.

While this was happening, two women arrived. Tukaram measured out their due and, when they asked for more, he invited them to take it themselves. One reached out timidly while the other urged her on. Tukaram, ever honest and generous, gave exact measure, and they found no discomfort in handling the grain. Speaking thus, they drew the rice with both hands. Tukaram did not restrain them, and onlookers witnessed the scene from all sides.

When some returned to the village, they told others of the event: “Tukaram, the merchant, is truly noble and virtuous, always absorbed in the service of the Lord. In weighing, he gives with full measure, often even double, and never does the grain so much as sting the hand. Such is his character.” Soon the matter became known throughout the town, and people came to see for themselves this guileless devotee whose work was swift and selfless.

If someone went home to fetch money, they often returned to find others had already taken the grain. Even then, they would tell Tukaram, “Our temple needs much—give us on credit, and we shall pay later.” The Vaishnava saint trusted them all and allowed them to take with their own hands. The news spread that he gave generously to anyone who asked, so that the entire crowd began to press upon him.

When the second sack was opened, Tukaram once again urged them to take for themselves. “If you all ask at once, how can I serve each one individually? I place my trust in you—take what you need with your own hands,” he said. Immediately everyone reached in at once, like dogs scrambling over leftover plates, each one intent on his own portion. Some pulled out large measures; others managed only a few handfuls. None considered what might happen later; each thought only of his own gain.

One man seized a whole maund, another five seers, another still less. Thus, in a short while, both sacks of chilies were emptied. Among them was one particularly shameless man who demanded an entire sack for himself, claiming his household had great need. “If you doubt me, ask anyone here,” he said. Hearing this, the gentle-hearted Tukaram trusted his word and gave him the sack, not perceiving the deceit hidden in his heart.

Within himself Tukaram felt content: “Better this business be concluded quickly,” he thought, and, bathing in that moment, he turned his mind toward the Lord of Rukmini. The day’s trade, from the sack of rice to the chilies, had yielded only a small sum in cash. Still, Tukaram rejoiced inwardly, for now the cooking could begin.

He took a brass pot, placed the rice upon the stove, and, absorbed in the remembrance of Janardana, dozed in the bliss of meditation. Seeing this, the Lord Himself pondered, “How unaware he is of worldly loss! The thieves have carried away three whole sacks of chilies, and the creditors will soon come demanding their goods. How will he answer them?”

Thus resolved, the Lord, protector of His devotee, assumed human form and went to the village. Entering one house, He spoke sweetly: “Lend me some grain at once, for I am in haste.” “And who are you?” they asked. “I am the servant of Tukaram the merchant,” replied the Lord, “and I have come to borrow on his behalf.”

Recognizing the saint’s name, they said, “He has always given to us; it is right that we should give to him.” Others added, “Tukaram always gives with his own hands; that is why he is known as the foremost among us.” Thus, in every home, the Lord gathered contributions, whether through devotion, through awe of His words, or through the marvel of seeing that whatever He touched weighed exactly as needed.

The people murmured, “Truly, the name of Tukaram is justified.” For love of His devotee, the Lord did not consider His own dignity; He took upon Himself the role of a humble beggar, going door to door. Some gave willingly; others gave grudgingly; yet none could resist His request.

In this manner, the Lord of Lotus Eyes collected from every house. Only the one who had taken the full sack of chilies remained unpaid. The Lord mused, “How will this man’s debt be recovered? He is harder than all the rest—like a stone in the rice that neither softens in water nor cooks on the fire.”

Perceiving the distress of His servant, Śrī Hari Himself stood at the threshold of the troublemaker’s dwelling. With righteous indignation kindled in His heart, He spoke in stern words, “This is Tukaśet, a man of upright character, and I, Vitthobā, am his servant. He has brought thee a sack filled with chillies. Settle his account at once.”

To the onlookers, He appeared as a simple and honest man who had brought the sack into the house. “My master awaits me,” He said, “therefore give me the payment now.” But the rogue within, unmoved by this divine presence in mortal guise, mocked Him and refused. The dark-hued Lord, standing there in the form of a common man, declared, “Then come with me to thy master.” With that, He dragged the fellow by force.

“Know that Tukaśet is my friend,” said the Lord, “and he has done me a great favour. How canst thou deny his due when I myself have come to settle it?” Yet the sinner replied insolently, “I will not pay. Let me see how thou wilt take it from me.” Seeing the hardness of his heart, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha acted in a manner most wondrous—casting aside all reserve, the indweller of the worlds took a rope and bound it about His own neck, declaring, “If thou wilt not pay, then I shall surrender my very life and bring ruin upon this whole village.”

Hearing such words, a crowd of men and women gathered, marvelling at the sight. They rebuked the rogue in many ways: “Who would give away a sack of chillies for nothing? Why dost thou quarrel in vain? Return the goods at once.” Pressured by the villagers’ wrath, the miscreant yielded, saying, “Take the sack now.” Yet the Lord, still acting in His strange play, replied, “Why didst thou not do this before?” And with His own hands He tied the rope about His neck even more firmly, as if to shame the rogue before all.

The onlookers gazed in astonishment—this was the very Supreme Lord, the One whom ascetics strive to behold through eightfold yoga, the One sought through great austerities by sages, the Father of Brahmā, the Beloved of Lakṣmī, the One praised by Nārada and the hosts of heaven—now bound by the cord of devotion for the sake of His servant!

The villagers, terrified at His threat to end His life, thought, “If this man dies here, our whole village will be ruined.” In fear they struck the rogue with fists and kicks, and gathered together the full price for the sack of chillies, counting every measure to make up the debt.

Having thus accomplished His purpose, the Lord—life of all the worlds—released Himself from the rope. Then, taking the form of the village headman, He approached Tukārām and said swiftly, “Here, take thy goods without delay.”

Sārangadhar, as He called Himself, explained, “I have collected the full payment for the chillies thou didst give on credit in the village, and have come at once to deliver it.” The loving devotee replied, “I had given them to be shared freely; why trouble thyself to bring me this payment?” But the headman said, “We householders are of good repute—why should the Lord lack anything?” And placing the bundle of money before him, he sat down in peace.

Then Tukā said with simplicity, “Bring me some clarified butter from across the river.” At once the headman arose, fetched a full vessel of ghee, and placed it before Tukā, who was filled with wonder. “The ghee seems abundant,” said Tukā, to which the Lord, in His headman’s guise, replied, “Ghee is plentiful here; what could be lacking in this village?”

Seeing the pure-hearted hospitality of His devotee, the Lord agreed to stay for a meal. Taking on yet another form—that of a wandering ascetic beyond all worldly ties—Sadāśiva Himself sat before Tukā’s house, saying, “I am a guest; give me the blessing of dining in your company.” Tukā, overjoyed, served him with reverence.

Thus, in the guise of both headman and mendicant, the Lord dined with His devotee. And when the meal was done, He rinsed His mouth, accepting a basil leaf from Tukā’s own hand—a token of love between the Eternal Master and His steadfast servant.

Seeing the pure-hearted devotion of Tukā, both Śiva and Viṣṇu partook together of his love. When he passed by, they blessed him with words of grace, honouring him with their divine benediction.

Making the loving devotee feel protected and blessed, the Lord in His mysterious way became a hidden chief in his company. Soon, the townsfolk gathered there, recognising Tukā, and began speaking to him with mixed feelings.

“Tukāśeṭ,” they said, “you are a Vaiṣṇava devotee, your lips ever engaged in chanting the holy name of Hari. Yet today, our whole village was brought to the brink of ruin. How shall we tell you what has happened?”

One after another they spoke, “At first this man came showing the ways of a saint, but in truth he was a deceiver. Declaring himself to be your agent, he went from house to house among our people. Like the heron that stands motionless in meditation, only to suddenly seize a fish that swims near, so did he appear outwardly as a saint while harbouring greed within. You all should know this truth.”

Thus, the elders and the youths of the village conversed among themselves, recounting the incident. Tukā, astonished in mind, asked the reason for their words. They then narrated the matter in full: “Vithojī, a man claiming to be your servant, went about every house

demanding repayment of debts. One man, having sent a whole sack of chillies with him earlier, found that Vithojī refused to return even a portion. When pressed, he tried to strangle the man with a rope. Hearing the commotion, the whole village gathered. They kicked him in the sides, struck him upon the face, and brought him to shame. Then the entire account was made clear and every debt settled — for otherwise, the man would have lost his life and our village would have been ruined."

When Tukā heard this tale, his Vaiṣṇava heart was filled with wonder. "If I say this is false," he thought, "the fact remains that all the debts have indeed been recovered. If I say it is true, yet I had not sent this man at all. Ah, this is but Hari's own play, a mysterious act of the Vaiṣṇava Lord, which I cannot fathom."

O listeners, this is the very essence of the Bhakta Līlāmṛta — a sacred Mānasa-sarovara where the fortunate, loving, and wise hear of the saints' doings. How, indeed, should such great sages be honoured so that they may be pleased? Such is the thought that arises in the poet's heart.

Therefore, stringing together the fresh flowers of pure and candid verses, he prepares a garland in many forms. Becoming as a king of flowers, he stands amidst the assembly of Vaiṣṇavas.

Thus concludes the twenty-seventh chapter of the Bhakta Līlāmṛta, a sweet chapter that fulfils the heart's desire merely by hearing it. May the loving and devoted listeners be blessed.

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Chapter 28

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Śrī Gaṇeśa)

In me there is neither cleverness nor strength of intellect, nor am I a skilful or learned poet. Yet, with the innocent fondness of a child of the saints, I pass my time in contemplation, letting the hours of life flow away in such remembrance. My letters are not well-formed nor purified; I do not possess mastery over the fifty-six diverse languages; the exalted words of Sanskrit do not naturally arise upon my tongue, for my speech is but an unpolished babble. I am not one who has dwelt long in a sacred kṣetra; I am but a villager from an obscure hamlet. Even the shelter of a true master-writer has not been my lot. My body too is frail; there is no steady health within it, and illnesses arise at every moment. In every way I am a crippled soul—but all this, O compassionate Lord Viṭṭhala, is fully known to You.

Yet, relying entirely upon Your grace, I have begun this work. Upholding the self-respect of one who is destitute, may You, Śrī Hari, bring it to its worthy completion. When a blade of grass is extinguished in a whirlwind, can the grass itself claim any doership? Or when a puppeteer moves the strings, causing the puppet to dance in manifold ways, can the puppet act independently? In like manner, seated within the sanctum of my heart, it is You alone who grant the memory and inspiration to speak of Your glories. Without Your grace, saints will not accept these words; just as without fragrance no one would ever ask for musk in the marketplace, so too, without Your blessing, these utterances will be tasteless.

A peacock's feather, though beautiful, has eyes upon its every part, yet it is lifeless; so also, without Your mercy, all words, however adorned, appear barren. Therefore, trusting in Your kindness, I shall narrate in detail the sacred lives of devotees, so that the hearts of listeners may overflow with love when they hear them.

In the preceding chapter, the tale was told of how Tukā, becoming a servant of Rukmiṇī, went from house to house, and by the grace of the Lord, was freed from his debts. Hearing of this from the townsfolk, tender-hearted devotees would marvel, saying, "What indeed is Paṇḍharīnātha doing for him? This is beyond our understanding." Tukā then mounted his bullock and set out, this heroic Vaiṣṇava proceeding on his way, chanting the divine Name with love. Immersed in the form and name of the Lord, his mind was fixed, and so he passed through the countryside.

Upon the road, a trickster came before him. He had fashioned a lock of brass and coated it with a layer of gold. Showing it to Tukā, he said, "If you wish, I will give this to you." The loving devotee replied, "I have not even this small sum upon me." But remembering that he had recently received the entire amount he had borrowed, he brought it forth and showed it at once. The trickster said, "Give me what you have now; the rest I shall take quietly later, for I know you well." Trusting his words, Tukā counted the coins and gave them. The cheat went his way, and Tukā returned home content, thinking to himself, "Perhaps I should give

something to the moneylender, for grain has become costly and household expenses press heavily."

Innocent of deceit in any man's heart, Tukā's mind remained steadfast in the conviction that Janārdana pervades all beings. Like Dharmarāja, the son of Kuntī, whose wealth remained untouched though the three worlds were searched, so too was Tukā's purity of heart. Thus satisfied, he reached home. Soon the townsfolk, having heard the news, came to his house.

Sitting before his tethered cattle, Tukā was asked by the moneylender, "What have you brought back? Show us at once." Tukā replied, "I have sold the gold and brought the price here to clear the debt; take what is needed for household use." Speaking thus, the simple-hearted bhakta brought forth the lock and showed it. But when the shrewd men examined it, they found it to be brass beneath its surface. The moneylender struck his forehead in grief, and his wife lamented bitterly, saying, "You foolish sinner, always remembering the Lord of Paṇḍharpur! He has deceived you and stripped away your illusion. I will worship that merciless one no more."

Others mocked, "You are like an ignorant man thinking himself a scholar—having the touchstone in hand yet taking in exchange a mere pebble. You have no true discrimination." Still others said, "By trusting this cheat, you have brought ruin upon our household. How will you now manage the affairs of life? We cannot fathom your ways." Speaking thus, they went to their homes, while in the courtyard of the temple, grief settled heavily upon the household as they wondered what to do next.

Tukā's two wives looked upon him. The elder was named Rukhumābāī, the younger Avlībāī, also called Jijābāī. The younger, Avlī, was sharp in practical matters. She thought, "How will this household be maintained? My husband has lost his senses—he spends day and night in bhajan, but when he turns to work, no success comes, and now a time of hardship has arrived." She resolved, "I will pledge my own name, draw some capital, and place it in his hands. The profit will surely help me sustain the family."

Thus resolved, she went at once to the moneylender's house and said, "If you will accept my bond, then place the money in my hands." Now, Avlī's brother was a wealthy man, and the moneylender, knowing this, readily agreed. Two hundred silver coins were given to her, and she returned to the temple to speak to her husband: "I have redeemed our home from the moneylender; now you should travel with the traders to distant lands and seek honest profit."

Taking salt as merchandise, the merchants set out for the region of Bālegāṭ, and Tukā was urged to go with them and bring back wealth for the household. Thus, the two hundred silver coins were placed in his hands, and this humble servant of the Lord set forth with the Vaiṣṇava traders on their journey.

As Avlī was sending Tukā on his way, she cautioned him earnestly, "Guard this capital carefully now. Do nothing that might bring a curse upon my head. You are always absorbed

in the remembrance of Hari, and for that reason, some people may take advantage of you. That is why I pledged my own name, drew out this loan, and placed it in your hands. If you give it away to beggars, then you already know my nature." Speaking thus, she returned home, and Tukā, without further delay, loaded the salt upon his bullock and set out at once with the other merchants.

In due course, they reached the region of Bālegāṭ. There, selling the salt, they purchased jaggery, and all the merchants moved on toward the city, the loving bhakta walking among them. Truly, a pearl lying in the dust is recognized only by the discerning; gold hidden under brass can only be known by an examiner; the touchstone concealed among stones reveals its marvels only to the wise; and a diamond found among pebbles is prized only by the jeweller. In the same way, this heroic Vaiṣṇava moved in the midst of worldly traders, himself a living idol of bhakti, jnāna, and vairāgya—yet unnoticed by those whose hearts knew no repentance.

The merchants, seeing Tukā in their company, whispered among themselves, "What profit will this simpleton ever bring? He knows nothing of trade; he has abandoned worldly life and constantly longs for Vaikuṇṭha's Lord. He spends all his hours in bhajan; we shall gain nothing from him but a frown upon our foreheads." Thus they spoke, yet Tukā remained ever serene, neither exulting in joy nor cast down in sorrow.

Meanwhile, in the city, the traders sold their jaggery and took back their full payment. Tukā too sold his goods, collected all the money, and they all set out to return. On the way, they halted in the marketplace. There, a curious incident arose.

A brāhmaṇa stood with a wooden yoke about his neck and his beard grown long, asking for alms to perform a certain rite. The merchants said to him, "Many such come asking; we have nothing for you—go elsewhere." Speaking thus with hardness, they passed by, and none gave him even a morsel. Tukā, seeing this, approached the brāhmaṇa with gentle inquiry: "Tell me your story from the beginning to the end." The brāhmaṇa replied, "I once held the office of village headman, but the chief clerk deceived me and took the taxes. I was thrown into prison by bribery in the court. Only when I gave a large bribe was my honour saved. The king is most unjust; I am but a weak and helpless brāhmaṇa. Three hundred coins were demanded from me, but I could only give fifty; the rest remains unpaid. Therefore, I wander with my family, seeking alms. Even now a guard accompanies me, and I am not allowed any rest."

Hearing the brāhmaṇa's words, deep compassion arose in Tukā's heart. At once he comforted him: "Do not be troubled in your mind." Without delay he gave the brāhmaṇa two hundred and fifty silver coins, satisfying him completely. Seeing this astonishing act, the traders laughed among themselves, saying, "He has cast away the very stake upon which our trade depends. One should not remain in the company of such a man." They sent word to Jijā, "We have released your husband—come and take him home. This widower has no

means to feed his children, and yet he gives away his wealth to others." Thus, the merchants departed.

Tukā, however, stayed on to complete the brāhmaṇa's need. Placing the money in the guard's hands, he sent it to the court to clear the debt. He then called a barber to shave the brāhmaṇa's matted hair, and summoned his wife to cook a proper meal. Supplying all the ingredients from his own pouch, Tukā had ten brāhmaṇas fed, and both husband and wife were filled with satisfaction. They blessed him, saying, "O Lord of Rukmiṇī, ever protect this man. There is no such generous devotee of Viṣṇu to be found upon this earth. For twelve years we have sought alms, yet never have we received such wealth at once. May God grant you every good."

Hearing their blessings, Tukā's heart overflowed with joy at having engaged in such righteous service. Yet, at the same time, the fear of Avlī's sharp tongue troubled him greatly: "What shall I say to her upon returning home?" Knowing the thought in Tukā's heart, Sāraṅgadhara mused, "If the merchants go back and tell her, Avlī will be furious. She will beat him, and the moneylender will come demanding his loan. How will Paṇḍhari's Lord avert this blow?"

Then, without delay, Lord Paṇḍuraṅga Himself took on Tukā's form, went to the moneylender, and paid him the full principal and interest, taking back the mortgage deed. Giving five hoṇs besides, He said, "These you must hand over to Avlī." The moneylender replied, "You should take them home yourself." But the Lord, fearing that Avlī might be angered with Him, said, "Many days have passed without my adding to the household; now take this cash and these coins and give them to her at once."

Thus resolving within himself, the bestower of liberation swiftly departed, taking up his words as seed and his resolve as the plough, and hastened to the dwelling of the saintly Avli. There he narrated the entire account, yet when asked where the saint had gone, he replied that Tukaram must be sitting somewhere in deep remembrance of Lord Vitthal. Such was the divine arrangement, though none could perceive the subtle play. Enshrouded in the delusion of worldly affection, the human soul remained bewildered, unable to behold the Lord's mysterious sport.

After some days had passed, the Vaishnava Tukaram returned to his home. The womenfolk related the events that had taken place, though the true reason remained hidden even from their understanding. They complained that Tukaram had squandered the principal wealth and profit, giving away the funds to ransom a prisoner. Some declared that the debt thus incurred was by divine ordinance; others insisted that Tukaram's word was ever truthful. Jija, concealing the matter beneath an outward show, maintained the family's worldly repute.

Avli, however, accused him of being deceived by a cunning rogue, claiming that he had entirely lost his sense and ruined the household's standing. The merchants spread the story, and it became infamous among the townsfolk. Learning of the past incident, the traders

refused to extend him any further credit. Thereafter, the season turned severe—famine struck, rain failed utterly, and the cattle perished for want of fodder.

Thus Tukaram came to witness many sorrows of worldly life. Hearing of his plight, some were moved to love and sought to relieve his suffering. Yet the winds of misfortune swept away his wealth, and he appeared destitute in the eyes of the world. Those who had once maintained his honour now spoke disparagingly to his face. In the time of trial, his reputation among the people was shattered; some would not even allow him into their homes, and the grief weighed heavily upon his heart.

At home, there was no grain; the children were forced to fast. In that dreadful famine, none would lend him food. Seeing his affliction, he went from place to place seeking alms. At this point, some listeners, harbouring doubts, questioned the narrator: if Tukaram had indeed attained dispassion, why then was he still going from house to house? To this, the wise speaker gave an apt reply: just as one who has swallowed a fly is compelled to vomit it out, yet must endure the bile rising again and again until purged—so too the seeker, having wearied of worldly life, must act in ways that draw censure, so that all attachment is uprooted.

In the past, once or twice, Lord Panduranga had rescued Tukaram in times of peril; if such miracles became widely known, the people would hail him as a saint. To avoid such praise and keep the mind free from pride, he accepted blame and public reproach, deliberately wandering from house to house. To his relatives, friends, and kin, the Vaishnava devotee spoke thus: “My children and family are dying of hunger; find some means quickly.” But malicious tongues whispered that famine had struck every home and that such suffering was widespread.

When he approached the moneylenders for a loan, they drove him away, saying, “First repay what you took before, then we shall give you more.” Others, casting an evil glance upon him, accused him of bringing ruin to their own households by seeking aid. “Begone, you wretch!” they cried, shoving him aside, even as the tender-hearted saint endured their cruelty.

Then a few faithful friends and well-wishers came forward, promising to arrange a loan if only to save him from famine. “You are as our mother and father,” they said, “if you rescue us now.” Yet though he pleaded, no compassion stirred in the hearts of many. Hearing the people’s harsh replies, Tukaram felt deep shame within, and going to a lonely place, pondered what he should do. Calling Lord Panduranga to mind, he remembered that at home there was a measure of grain in a sack. Selling this at once to a merchant, he obtained eight seers of grain, and with great care prepared a thin gruel to keep the family alive.

Even this supply was soon exhausted, and his friends turned away from him entirely. There remained no place left to go. When he visited the houses of the wealthy, they thrust him out in haste, and his household sank into utter ruin. Disgraced among the people, abandoned by

relatives and friends, he faced a time of great calamity, when even a single measure of grain was hard to find. Death hovered over every living being; yet still Tukaram wondered what course to take.

People everywhere murmured that in this age of Kali, life itself is sustained only by food. On days when a little gruel could be had, they counted it a feast. Tukaram's elder wife cried for food again and again, and in his heart he felt the sting of shame, lamenting that his worldly life had come to naught. Then the townsfolk and neighbours spoke to him: "Listen well, Tukaram. All your days you have uttered the name of Vitthal with love upon your lips. For this reason, the very foundation of your worldly ties is being dissolved. You have been raised up as our leader, yet this is but the beginning—you will see more such trials, and the wicked will speak ill of you."

Like blows falling upon a wounded limb, so were these troubles heaped upon him; yet Tukaram, the ocean of peace, replied to the people with gentle words. "What must be, will not fail to come to pass; why waste speech in vain? And those who do not worship the Lord of Pandharpur—how shall they be saved from death?"

In that great famine, when no grain was to be found, countless creatures perished.

And why did they remember the Lord at such a time? Because suffering becomes the occasion and cause for calling upon Hari.

In this way, the heroic Vaishnava was given his answer. Now, listen attentively with your own ears to what further events unfolded.

Tukaram's eldest son was named Santoba, for whom he held deep affection. Yet this son entered the abode of death, and heavy sorrow weighed upon the saint's heart.

The burden of worldly grief, which he had once borne for the sake of joy, was now utterly resolved—he who had brought delight was gone. Seeing this, Tukaram's wife became silent and still. In her anguish, the Vaishnava exclaimed: "Let this worldly life be cursed! Let it all be abandoned."

When a living being remains seated in the burning house of worldly existence, this is the root of endless regret. Saints and holy ones have given many examples of this truth. Just as when Shiva drank the halāhala poison and his entire body burned—such is the scorching when one abides in worldly fire. In such a time, one turns to the chanting of Shri Rama's name. Even when creatures are scorched by the threefold miseries, the regret within still remains. It was for this reason, in many trials, that the Pandavas kept Shri Hari ever in their hearts. When Hiranyakashipu harassed Prahlāda in countless ways, and the boy cried out in regret, the Lord Himself appeared from the pillar to protect him. Such examples are many. Beings suffer the threefold hells, and afterwards, through repentance, they gain the bliss of liberation. So it was with Tukaram: he endured such a fate, beholding many afflictions of the worldly path. All this I now narrate to you as best I can, so listen with devotion.

In his thirteenth year, his father departed from the world, casting off the bonds of household life. Tukaram then displayed a diligence that gladdened his father's heart. In his seventeenth year, both mother and father passed away in succession. Then his elder brother's wife died suddenly. In his eighteenth year, his brother Savji left on a pilgrimage. The separation from him brought sorrow to Tukaram's heart. In his twentieth year, seeing his wife and children, he yet clung to the worldly ties. It was then that the Lord of Lords began His work upon him. In his twenty-first year, a contrary time befell: his fortunes collapsed, and his relatives laughed at him openly. His wife, unlearned in the ways of spiritual truth, also passed away, still crying for food. Such is the delusion—children and worldly concerns—all of which turn contrary in a moment. Thus the first half of his life passed, seeing many kinds of suffering. Even his attachment to the world was dissolved, and the illusion dispelled.

When the night of ignorance departs, the sun of knowledge appears suddenly, and joy knows no bounds. When the ocean was churned, the gods first grew weary; but at the sight of the nectar in the end, Indra rejoiced. When curd is churned, it seems a laborious task; yet when fresh butter appears before the eyes, the housewife is content. Likewise in farming: the toil seems great, but when the crop ripens thick and full, the farmer's heart is gladdened. When the sugarcane is pressed, the effort is heavy; yet when it takes the form of sweet sugar, the eater knows its delight. So in the beginning, the path of the seeker brings sorrow; but in the end, its fruit is unparalleled bliss. This is known by those who have awakened true discernment. Enough now of many examples—this is the poet's way of speech. Now, focusing your mind in true remembrance, listen, O devoted listeners.

Having lost both wife and children, Tukaram was filled with deep regret. Then, going into solitude, his heart withdrawn from the world, he began to ponder within himself. One who places his trust in this worldly life, thinking it to be his sure support, soon discovers, upon experience, that it yields naught but deeper sorrow. As charcoal, when rubbed, reveals only greater darkness within, so too the life of worldly entanglement discloses a mountain of grief when truly tested. If, by some rare chance, one could find peaceful slumber upon a bed of thorns, then perhaps some measure of happiness might be found in worldly existence—but even that would be but a dream's fleeting vision. Consider the cobra's venom: even if one beholds it only at first and thinks to keep away, yet in the end death is inevitable—this is truth unshaken. If, while still in the midst of worldly life, the mind were firmly resolved upon God, then why would Śukadeva, the sage of supreme wisdom, have abandoned all and sat apart in the forest's solitude?

My own life, says the saint, has already been squandered in the delusions of the world. Now, in the little time remaining, let me with certainty adore the Lord, the consort of Rukmiṇī. With this firm resolve in heart, Tuka ascended the mountain, as a faithful wife, Sati, goes forth to join her Lord, relinquishing all possessions. Parents, children, and wealth—these he would not hold in mind, but, eager to meet his Beloved, would leap into the very fire.

In the same manner, the devotee Tuka climbed the mountain, and within his heart remembered the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, pleading with boundless yearning for His compassion. Fixing both eyelids upon the form of Pāṇḍuraṅga, he prayed: “O Lord of all lords, consort of Rukmiṇī, hear my entreaty. How should I meditate upon Thee? I know not the manner in the least. Show me, Thy humble supplicant, the way in which I may behold Thee. Tell me how I may praise Thee, how I may serve Thee with certainty, and in what mood Thou wilt appear before me. In what manner should I sing Thy praise? How should I bring Thy form before the mind’s eye in meditation? How should I live amidst mankind? Teach me all this, my Lord.”

“For Thou art beyond perception, hidden from the senses; how then shall I, a lowly creature, bring Thee into the sight of my mind? Even Yama, Varuṇa, and Kubera cannot reach Thy limits. The moon, the sun, and the stars ceaselessly circle about Thee, yet cannot compass Thee. Indra and the gods know not Thy bounds—what then am I, a mere insect, to hope for? Even Brahmā, born from the lotus of Thy navel, searched for its end and found it not, and so began at once to praise Thee. Lord Śiva and Pārvatī, longing for Thy vision, remember Thee with ardor, yet Thou art difficult of attainment even for them. How then shall my yearning be fulfilled?”

Such thoughts filling his mind, Tuka continued to behold in his heart the deity of Pāṇḍuraṅga. Seeing this pure and loving devotion, what would the Lord of Lakṣmī do but respond? For seven days continuously, the saint sat with eyes closed, his mind unwavering. Whether life would remain or depart, he cared not, but he ceaselessly repeated the Lord’s Name. Body, speech, and mind were gathered into one, and he besought the Lord with a love born of compassion. Such is the marvel the Lord of Rukmiṇī reveals to the righteous and faithful.

At that time, a vast and terrible form appeared—dark as the rain-cloud, in the shape of a mighty serpent, encircling Tuka as Time itself might encircle all beings at the world’s end. Raising its great hood, it hissed fiercely, yet Tuka’s mind held no fear; his eyes remained shut, unmoved. Then, from the heavens, a sudden voice spoke, revealing the divine mystery: “Having taken this form of a great serpent, the Lord of Rukmiṇī has come to you. Therefore open your eyes, O loving devotee, and behold. Let no fear find place in your heart.”

Hearing these words, the saint thought within: “If the Lord has taken a serpent’s form, then I shall not behold Him thus.” For the scriptures and the Purāṇas declare that all beings are filled with Nārāyaṇa—if so, how shall one say who is delivered and who is not? Just as the chataka bird will drink only the rain from the heavens and refuse the water of earth, so too will I, a worshipper of Pāṇḍuraṅga, see Him only in the form my heart knows, and not in many other shapes. That form described in scripture and treasured by saints within the heart—such alone will I behold when the giver of final liberation appears.

Knowing this inner resolve of Tuka, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha revealed Himself outwardly in truth, bound fast by the ties of love and devotion. At once there stood before him the dark-hued Lord, four-armed, holding conch, discus, mace, and lotus. Seeing the love of His

servant, the sovereign of all souls appeared. Tuka opened his eyes, and there, before him, stood the consort of Rukmiṇī, divine earrings shaped like makaras glistening at His ears.

That Lord of Lords, the King of Paṇḍharpur, lifted Tuka in His arms, as a mother fondly embraces her infant child. "You are my darling," said the Lord, "now open your eyes and see. Never shall I forsake you." Thus spoke the dark-blue Lord.

In that instant, Tuka's body entered the state beyond embodiment, slipping into deep samādhi. Then, awakening him gently, the Lord of Rukmiṇī said, "Look now upon Me with certainty."

Then, opening his eyes at that blessed moment, Tukaram beheld before him the Lord reclining upon the serpent Śeṣa—the very Saguna form he had long cherished within his heart. Yet what he saw now surpassed, in beauty and glory, even the vision he had conceived in silent meditation. For what the mind had dimly pondered in secrecy now shone with still greater virtues and loveliness. Tukaram sat utterly still, his heart filled, beholding his true and final refuge with unwavering gaze.

In times past, having turned away from worldly attachments, he had entered the forest unknown to any, seeking only the Lord's service. None knew where he had gone. Yet his younger brother, named Kanhaya, was steadfast in affection and truth. Day and night he searched tirelessly for his brother through the deep valleys and lofty mountains. With firm resolve in his heart, he declared that only when he beheld Tukaram would he take food again.

As Bharata, enduring the separation from Śrī Rāma, set aside all comfort and turned his mind towards renunciation, so was Kanhaya's determination complete for the sake of his brother. Through dense forests and over mighty peaks he searched for seven days without pause. Then, quite suddenly, he came upon the ascetic Bhāmbanātha, and there too appeared Kanhaya.

The sight of the Lord and His devotee together brought him perfect contentment. In that moment, even while in the body, Kanhaya became as one beyond the body, absorbed in full spiritual ecstasy. Without effort or delay, his eyes fell upon the Lord of Rukmiṇī, dazzling in divine raiment of golden yellow, makara-shaped earrings gleaming at His ears. The jeweled crown upon His head scattered rays of brilliance that dimmed the radiance of the sun itself. The Kaustubha gem and the Vaijayantī garland shone resplendent upon His breast, as He clasped Tukaram to His bosom.

Thus was the meeting of God and devotee accomplished, and Kanhaya gazed his fill upon the scene. Overcome with devotion, he fell prostrate upon the earth, tears flowing freely from his eyes. Then the Compassionate One spoke to Tukaram: "Ask of Me any boon thou desirest." Hearing this, the wise devotee replied, "Grant me only that I may never forget Thee. As a mother never forsakes her infant child, as the doe guards her fawn, so do Thou, O Hṛ̥īkeśa, protect me, Thy humble servant."

Then said the Lord, the Life of the Worlds: “It is for thy sake that I take form in this world. Through the ages, what other cause have I for My descents? Was it not for Puṇḍalika’s sake that I stood upon the banks of the Bhīma, My hands resting upon My hips, to grant him vision? Thy forefather, Viśvambhara, served Me with great devotion, and I granted him a boon, remaining with him in manifest form.”

As the Lord of Śeṣa spoke these words, Tukaram at once clung to His feet. Kanhaya, beholding this blessed sight, was filled with inexpressible joy. Then the auspicious lamp of worship was waved before the Lord of Rukmiṇī in bright ārati, and the next chapter of the sacred narrative prepared to unfold, bringing delight to the assembly of saints.

Whosoever listens to the lives of the saints with a pure mind shall behold the lotus-like eyes of the Lord and see the world as pervaded by the Self. Those who sing of Tukaram’s life with love shall be sheltered by the Lord of Rukmiṇī from all worldly calamities. Even as a mother smiles upon the babbling words of her child, so does the Lord listen kindly to the unpolished speech of His devotees, correcting and perfecting them by His grace.

For I, says the humble narrator, know nothing of subtlety or skill, and cannot discern the greater from the lesser. Yet You, O Lord, by Your gift of compassion, shall set right these words. It is You who inspire the wise with thoughts and grant them the power to speak. Taking the king as but an occasion, You cause this book to grow in length and sweetness.

Thus ends the twenty-eighth chapter of the Bhaktalīlāmṛta, brimming with love, its mere hearing fulfilling the heart’s longing. Like pure nectar, it delights the affectionate devotees of Viṣṇu.

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Chapter 29

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Lord Gaṇeśa)

All glory to Thee, O Lord, who art the very embodiment of Sat–Cit–Ānanda, the ocean of compassion! Thy renown transcends the bounds of the universe and cannot be contained therein. Yet Thou, the tender-hearted One, dost lovingly accept the humble ārati of Thy devotees, O Lord Viṭṭhala, beloved Consort of Rukmiṇī. To the stubborn haṭha–yogis and seekers of Brahma–jnāna, Thou dost reveal the profound mysteries of Yoga, which are so difficult to grasp. But to the simple-hearted, guileless, and true devotees, Thou dost teach the pure path of Dharma as revealed in the Bhāgavata.

Once, the sage Sanaka and the other sons of Brahmā raised a most wondrous question. Hearing it, Brahmā—the lotus-born—was momentarily perplexed. Then, with heartfelt devotion, he began to offer Thee praise. Moved by his prayer, Thou didst appear there in the form of a swan and, out of Thine own grace, Thou didst expound unto him the Bhāgavata in the form of the four seed-verses (catuḥ–śloki).

When Brahmā drank the nectar of Thy divine speech, his being was filled with supreme bliss. In due course, he instructed Nārada in the ten-fold essence of the Bhāgavata. Nārada, overflowing with love, roamed ceaselessly, singing Thy glories day and night. It was then that he came upon Vyāsa, the son of Parāśara, and, with a heart full of affection, inquired of him.

“Master,” said Nārada, “I have composed the eighteen Purāṇas, along with many other scriptures and profound histories. I have narrated them in their entirety. Yet, when I look within, I find my mind restless and unsatisfied. Tell me, is there a means by which it may be firmly stilled?”

Hearing the earnest question of his true disciple, Nārada was gladdened and composed one hundred verses of the Bhāgavata, which he imparted to him. Then the noble Vyāsa, son of Parāśara, expanded them into the great Śrīmad Bhāgavata, saying, “This alone will steady the mind and lead to the highest good of the Self.” Thus the eighteen-thousand-verse scripture was born—a work that contains the very essence of the Upaniṣads.

Śukadeva, the foremost of yogis, beheld this treasure with love and imparted it to King Parīkṣit. Through it, countless seekers were delivered, though no one can count their number. Such art Thou, O Lord of Vaikuṇṭha—Thou who art the dearest friend of the loving, having fashioned the Bhāgavata–dharma as a great boat by which mankind may cross the ocean of worldly existence.

Yet, in the age of Kali, few can rightly grasp the true import of the Bhāgavata. Therefore didst Thou take birth amidst the saints, so as to speak in a manner intelligible even to worldly minds. The manifold lives of these saints, O Lotus-eyed Lord, are in truth narrated by Thee alone. They are but the instruments; the will and wisdom are Thine.

If one has been taught to speak by another, what marvel is it that he speaks? Even so, without Thee, O Infinite One, the dull-witted cannot be illumined.

At the close of the previous chapter, it was told how Bhāmbhanātha and Parvatī–Tukā were together when Kanhāya–bandhu arrived there. In that place they beheld Thee, O Lord, beloved of Rukmiṇī. Seeing Thy devotee, Thou didst grant him vision and then disappear. The very spot where Thy feet rested is held sacred to this day.

At that site, Kanhāya planted a pillar and placed upon it the sacred pādukās. Tukā's mind bowed in reverence, and his heart was filled with loving joy. Soon after, both brothers hastened to their native village of Dehu. There, on the banks of the Indrayāṇī river, Tukā seated himself. Within seven days, both brothers knew that their final liberation was at hand.

On the morning of the seventh day, after bathing at sunrise, they broke their fast there. Then, from Kanhāya, the Vaiṣṇava devotees brought certain sacks from the temple. These contained the wealth of their forefathers. Speaking to Kanhāya, Tukā said, "Without experience, mere book-knowledge is futile; so also, wealth in another's hands is but a burden to a corrupt mind. If there lingers the hope—'Will they give it to us or not?'—such desire ever troubles the heart. Therefore, I would cast these sacks into the Indrayāṇī's waters at once."

Kanhāya, hearing this, replied, "Brother, you have wholly embraced renunciation, but as for me, the duties of worldly life still remain." Knowing the inclination of Kanhāya's heart, Tukā found a fitting solution. He divided the sacks into two portions, and sinking one half in the river, he gave the other half to Kanhāya, saying, "From today, let this suffice for your clothing and other needs. Seek alms for food and thus serve the Lord without hindrance. As for you, your worldly duties will be met by this portion."

He continued, "Begging and business must not be mingled; thus the sages have decreed. Hearing this, Kanhāya turned wholly to household life, while Tukā, in full renunciation, gave up all thought of worldly ties. Casting aside all sense of social propriety, he fixed his mind on contemplation. Through the strength of detachment, he restrained his senses and curbed their wanderings.

With scant food, he weakened the hold of the senses, and thus sleep and sloth never overcame him. Day and night, in ceaseless devotion, he sang the Lord's praises. Each morning, after his bath, he went to the temple of Pāṇḍuraṅga, and having offered worship, he would retire to the solitude of the forest.

To the west of Dehu, at a distance of three krośas, lies Bhāṇḍār Mountain. There Tukā would sit in steadfast meditation. At this point, the listeners to the tale began to wonder, and one among them asked the speaker, "Did Tukā ever meet the Lord, the very Consort of Rukmiṇī, in His manifest form? If he did, why then did he impose such austerities on his senses?"

To this it was replied: When the sun rises, its light touches all creatures alike, yet it belongs to none, nor does it tarry for even a moment. Even so, by divine fortune, Tukā beheld the Lord of Lakṣmī once in full reality. But his heart longed to remain ever in His company.

For the devotees, the attainment of the Lord does not end their devotion; rather, it deepens it. When the Gaṅgā meets the ocean, she still hastens forward with joy.

The mighty wind may pierce the boundaries of the universe, and its presence is felt in all quarters; yet its restlessness never ceases—it will not remain still even for a moment. In like manner, the devotees of the Lord, though they have attained complete union with Him in essence, still divide their time between twofold expressions of love—ceaseless worship by day and night.

Even as the Lord Lakṣmī–Nārāyaṇa, reposing upon Śeṣa, abides in perfect solitude with His consort, yet allows the attendants to behold Him for a while, so too do the devotees return each to their own dwelling after the sacred śejarati, without any real separation from Him. Śeṣa himself never feels any distance from the Lord, and yet continues to worship Him with unbroken love.

Thus also was Tukā, the heroic Vaiṣṇava, of a love for the Lord so constant that it never lost its savour. He would go alone to the mountain and there offer his worship in full earnestness. Casting away all sense of "I" and "mine," he beheld all people alike, and the very name of ego never entered his thoughts—not even in a dream. Having forsaken egoism at the root, the fear of worldly existence naturally fell away, and, in the stillness of that state, the body itself seemed to pass beyond the touch of sickness.

In this manner Tukā renounced entirely the root of saṃsāra—self-identity—and dwelt daily in solitude, meditating upon the beloved Consort of Rukmiṇī. He held firm to the conviction that apart from the remembrance of the divine Holy Name there is no other means of attainment. This vow he fulfilled by day and night. Bringing before his inward vision the form of Pāṇḍuraṅga, he fixed it steadfastly within the gaze of both eyes, saying, "Without Thy Name, O Śrīpati, I find no other rest."

"The Name is my fierce austerity; the Name is my mantra and my japa; the Name is my solemn vow; through the Name alone I shall become free from all sin. The Name is my family tradition; the Name is my noble heritage. Without the Name there is no support—this is my firm resolve, O Śrī Hari. Without the Name, wealth and riches are as nothing. Come now, O Viṭhobā, and bear me across this ocean of worldly existence to the far shore."

Thus, day after day, in his solitude Tukā poured forth his heart's yearning. In the evenings he would come to the village and, with joy, dance in the temple. Seeing him, the people would speak in many ways: some said, "Tukā has become mad—he sings the Name day and night, and has given up all desire for worldly life." Some said, "His business has failed; through misfortune he has suffered loss; his mouth is now filled with meaningless chatter." Others

said, “He has thrown all the family wealth into the Indrayāṇī; giving up worldly ties, he has chosen the path of the spirit.”

Some, however, scoffed, saying, “What is the gain in abandoning worldly life? The body cannot live without food. He leaves his children and goes to sit upon the mountain, yet still goes from house to house begging when hunger comes.” Others defended him: “Why speak ill of him for giving up his trade? Many in the world have fallen into trouble—better to worship Govinda.”

In this way, three kinds of people spoke with varied opinions. But Tukā, with a heart full of joy, remained utterly without awareness of the body. Even as a traveller in a royal carriage ignores the barking of dogs along the road, so did he walk on, untroubled by the clamor of the world. As the ocean’s roaring does not disturb Agastya, so the harsh words of men could not disturb his mind. When floods of criticism poured in, his heart drank them in as if they were draughts of peace. The pathways of lust and anger were destroyed, hopes and desires were broken, and delusion and attachment were uprooted. He had only Brahman to fashion his body—such was the true form of the Vaiṣṇava Tukā.

With loving devotion fixed in his heart, he worshipped daily the form of Pāṇḍuraṅga. By day he sat alone in the forest, offering worship with deep love. At one spot, on the banks of the Indrayāṇī, there was shade beneath the karanja trees, and there this devotee would sit in meditation.

Near that place a farmer had sown his field, and the crop had ripened so that the grain had filled out fully. One day the farmer came to inspect his field, looking around on all sides. Approaching Tukā, he spoke thus: “Tukā–śeṭ, I have one request. Please sit here and guard my field for a while. I will give you grain in payment, enough to feed your household.”

The farmer’s words were simple: “Since you are sitting idly at home, how will the household be maintained? Better, then, to sit in my field and guard it constantly, chanting ‘Hari, Hari’ all the while.” Hearing this, the heroic Vaiṣṇava Tukā readily agreed. Without hesitation, he rose and walked along with the farmer.

Such was Tukā’s state: whatever anyone said, he accepted without resistance, knowing only the good of others. Like a little child who accepts without question whatever is placed in its hands, be it pleasant or unpleasant, so Tukā would instantly act, without weighing or doubting in his mind. Or like water which, on receiving sugar, instantly becomes sweet, or when mixed with salt, instantly becomes saline—so Tukā had no insistence on his own way, but conformed to the need of the moment.

The farmer then placed in Tukā’s hand a sling, saying, “Sit here on the watch-platform. I give my field entirely into your care—guard it day and night until my companions return. I will pay you in grain at harvest.” Having said this, the farmer departed swiftly to fetch something from a distant place, telling his household that he had left Tukā to guard the crop.

Meanwhile, the Vaiṣṇava devotee Tukā climbed quickly to the watch-platform and looked about. Soon he saw the birds settling upon the crop. Within himself he thought, "These too are the Lord's creatures; they are hungry like all beings. We call ourselves devotees and servants of God—how then can we drive them away?"

He remembered the famine of past years, and how, by the good fortune of the world, the fields had now yielded abundantly. "If we drive them away from this food," he thought, "we make ourselves deserving of misfortune." Thus, the loving devotee remained seated, making only the appearance of a watchman, but never chasing the birds away.

When two prahars of the day had passed, he spoke gently to the birds: "If your bellies are now full, then go at once to the water to drink." And with that, he sat peacefully, absorbed in bhajan. The sound of his chanting of the Name drifted into the village, where it was heard from afar.

At home, his wife waited, saying, "He has not returned yet today—where could he have gone? Wandering aimlessly through village and forest, he has forsaken worldly life; what am I to do now?" Speaking to their daughter, she said, "Go and see where your father is sitting—tell him I am hungry and cannot eat without him."

The elder daughter, Kāśībāī, ran quickly to him and said, "Come home now for your meal." He replied, "I am guarding this field; the farmer has promised to give us grain. Go home and tell your mother." The girl returned and reported this, whereupon the mother sent food to him so that they might eat later together.

Tukā ate the simple bread there, and as he ate, he reflected within himself: "If I must be here night and day, why not remain in this service constantly, without wasting time wandering about?"

Thus, each morning, after his bath and worship of Pāṇḍuraṅga in the temple, he would come swiftly to the field and sit in solitude, engaged in bhajan. In the evenings he would say to the birds, "Now, all of you fly away, for soon it will be fully dark and the path will not be visible." And so the loving Vaiṣṇava would send them off, saying, "Come again at dawn, all of you, without delay."

Observing the ways of the birds, Tukā marvelled in his heart: "They eat only the few grains they need here, and take nothing back to their homes. When, O Lord of gods, will You make my heart like theirs—free from hoarding, content with what is given? Without You, O Keśava, who else will fulfil my longing? Let the last trace of my self-concealment be destroyed before Your Name and Form. Let me see all beings as my very Self, and be utterly without body-consciousness.

"I ask no kinsman, friend, or saint to arrange my welfare—whether I live or die, let no one trouble themselves for me. Let my body perish without anyone's concern—that alone will be my peace of mind."

Tukaram's heart was fixed on one desire—that his life might be as the withered leaf carried effortlessly upon the wind, moving only where the Divine breath directed. He prayed, "O Lord, grant me the worthy gift of being able to proclaim Thy virtues with my own mouth." In his sight, the birds and beasts upon the trees, the ant as well as the creator Brahma—all were pervaded by the one all-encompassing Consciousness. To him, gold, stone, and clay appeared alike; never should vain desire arise in his heart—such was the grace he sought from Shripati. Whether harsh insult reached his ears, or lofty praise was spoken of him, both he wished to feel as equal.

Thus, Tukaram daily nurtured in his heart the vision of Panduranga, filling himself with self-born bliss. With the sling hanging idly by his side, he kept watch over the field in spirit but was inwardly kindling the fire of devotion. Sleep scarcely touched his body; at the faintest drowsiness, he awoke alert.

All the birds of the village, knowing his nature, came daily and without fear. After eating but a few grains each, the Vaishnava saint rejoiced at their satisfaction, as one might rejoice to see a compassionate benefactor feeding a row of Brahmins in his home. In the same manner, Tukaram's joy was to feed the hunger of these little creatures.

Thus passed a month. One day, the farmer returned from his journey, eager to see how his crop had ripened. He came quickly to the field—only to find every ear of grain stripped bare, without a single kernel remaining. Anguish rose in him, and he bit his lip, thinking, "Tukaram has plotted against me! But to whom shall I complain for justice?"

Looking about in all four directions, his approach startled the birds, which flew away together. He thought bitterly, "This is like a meal where, as soon as a low-caste person enters, the Brahmins rise at once, leaving their food on the spot."

Searching the whole field, he saw that it was indeed eaten clean by the birds. On the watch-platform sat Tukaram, immersed in loving worship. The farmer strode toward him, uttering harsh words: "How have you ruined my household? I left you, servant of the Lord, to guard this field for a whole month, trusting you entirely while I went away. And you have fed it to the birds!"

Seizing Tukaram by the wrist, he cried, "Now you will not escape the knot you have tied for yourself!" He thought, "One is a rogue, another a saint; one is poison, another nectar—and fate has bound them together."

In his mind he compared it to unlikely meetings: the ocean and the sage Agastya; Rahu and the moon; the royal swan and the hawk; the chaste wife and the wanton woman; the defamer and the pure-hearted devotee. Such was the ill-starred union between himself and Tukaram.

In anger, he brought Tukaram before the village headmen and the clerk, complaining of his loss. The panchayat gathered, seeing Tukaram with a swollen face and bruised chest, while

the farmer pressed his case. They asked what had happened, and Tukaram, in whose speech no falsehood could ever cling, told the truth plainly: “This man told me he would pay me in grain if I guarded his field. I agreed. But the birds—creatures of the same Lord—would have perished if I had driven them away. They ate only a few grains here, taking nothing to their nests. Why then should I have forbidden them?”

Hearing this, the people laughed, but the farmer’s anger only deepened. He said, “Then you may keep your watch-platform; I will go my own way. But I will not bear the loss—you must answer for it to the revenue officer!” The villagers reminded him, “You still owe the government tax; if you run away, who will pay on your behalf?”

When they asked the farmer the truth of his loss, he admitted, “It was about two khands of grain,” and confirmed it before witnesses. The villagers said to Tukaram, “Since you have admitted to letting the field be eaten, you must give a written bond to supply this amount.” Tukaram, in his humility, agreed without hesitation, signing the bond and handing it to the farmer.

The foolish man, seeing this paper, felt content, not realizing that in accepting it he had harmed his own welfare, being blind to the Lord’s glory. The village elders, curious to see the truth, decided to go at once to the field and verify the state of the crop.

The village headman and the elders, accompanied by others, set out together to inspect the field. But even before they arrived, Pandharinath, in His wondrous play, had worked a marvel. Where once the crop had been stripped bare, now the ears of grain shone as if a philosopher’s stone had touched them—yet with tenfold greater fullness. Each stalk bent under the weight of kernels packed thick and heavy. Many other such marvels were visible to the villagers’ eyes. Not a trace remained of the birds’ pecking anywhere; astonished, they gazed upon the sight, murmuring that such a wonder was beyond measure.

The very farmer who had earlier accused Tukaram now turned to him and said, “You must take charge of this field entirely, and I will give you your due reward.” The elders, however, warned him: “Do not go back to the panchayat with such reversals, for who will trust our word if we behave so?” All understood that this miracle was no ordinary chance—it was the doing of Vithoba Himself, who had taken upon Himself the care of His devotee Tukaram. The matter was already sealed by a written bond; thus, the farmer could not evade it. “From the yield,” the elders said, “you shall first give the promised portion to him, and then you may take the rest.”

The villagers advised Tukaram, “For your sake, let the field now be guarded well.” But the saintly Vaishnava replied, “That would not be fitting at all. I had taken nothing from the farmer, yet such accusation and blame came upon me. If I were to claim this field as my own, who knows what greater penalties might follow?” With such detachment did he speak, ever inclined towards bhajan with a heart full of love for the Lord.

The villagers then appointed a laborer to guard the field. When the harvest was reaped and the sheaves counted, the yield amounted to seventeen khandis of grain. All were amazed, for never in living memory had such a crop been seen in that village. They marveled at the rare handiwork of God, who reveals His wonders in myriad ways.

Some said, “In Tukaram’s house famine and hunger had been pressing heavily, and the Lord has hastened to provide for him.” Others remarked, “The farmer’s destiny is indeed great, for even when Tukaram, the merchant, is ruined and owes grain to many, still the crop is abundant.” Others again said, “The birds ate the grain, and this brought immense merit; its fruit has been seen now in this full harvest.”

Thus, in various ways, the people spoke according to their own imagination, each influenced by the irresistible illusion of Vaishnava love. From the seventeen khandis, two were set aside for the farmer, as agreed, and even the advance taken from Tukaram was returned to him. The villagers said to Tukaram, “Take this grain and store it at your home; the Lord has blessed you because of your disinterested heart.” But the tender-hearted saint paid no heed; no trace of greed ever arose in him, for he lived ever in contented detachment.

True detachment—nirpeksha—is the mark of spiritual maturity; only he who desires nothing is rightly called wise. In such a one, peace dwells naturally; from detachment springs renunciation, and from renunciation, perfect contentment of heart. In the mould of detachment are formed the signs of discrimination; such a one is honored by all, for with him abide many spiritual perfections. Of other paths and conditions there is little to be said—true bhakti is ultimately chosen by the detached soul, and he alone attains the highest place in the world. All else is but empty show.

Such were the marks clearly visible in Tukaram; therefore the Lord, the beloved of Rukmini, revealed so many marvels in his life. But hear now what followed. Though the villagers urged him to accept the grain, Tukaram would not take it. Then a certain pious headman, Mahadajipant by name, took the grain to his own home, saying, “It has ripened by the will of God; therefore it should be put to righteous use.”

In this way does the Bhaktalilamrita reveal the nectar of the saints’ lives. Truly it is supreme ambrosia, served to the fortunate Vaishnavas who love it with all their hearts. Those who have conquered the six inner enemies and live in the world without hatred are alone worthy to taste it. He whose heart longs for God-realization finds sweetness in hearing such bhakti; for others, it brings no such delight. Therefore, O saints, listen in friendship and humility, speaking with gentle and respectful words, without pride or arrogance.

Just as a wealthy man may wear a ring of brass, yet to the eyes of the beholder it will seem of gold, so too when you, O listeners, give your full attention to this saint’s life, the great ones of the earth will call you blessed. Thus ends this chapter of the Bhaktalilamrita, the twenty-ninth in order, brimming with the sweetness of devotion and the marvels of the Lord’s play.

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Chapter 30

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (In the blessed name of Lord Gaṇeśa)

Today, the fruit of countless births has ripened; the true fortune of the listeners has arisen. Therefore, words spring forth from my lips to narrate the sacred lives of saints.

By the grace destined for the people, as the boundless monsoon pours down upon the earth, so too, by the destined conjunction of celestial beings, precious gems emerge from the depths of the ocean. As the noble crest of the royal swan brings forth lustrous pearls, as pure gold arises at once to adorn beauty, as radiant rays descend from the heavens to illumine the earth, as the moon manifests to grace the night sky—so have the lives of saints appeared, fashioned for the worship of the manifest form of the Lord, like divine flowers prepared for ritual offering. These saintly narratives become ornaments to the ears of the faithful.

When heard, they inspire contemplation; contemplation deepens into meditation; and through meditation, the seeker beholds the Lord in direct realization, confirming the truth through experience.

In the preceding chapter, it was told how the birds devoured the standing crop, and how, in wondrous sport, the Lord of Paṇḍharpur caused the harvest to be even more abundant. Tukā, taking the grain thus given, engaged himself entirely in devotional singing, casting aside all worldly entanglements and immersing himself in the steadfast worship of the Lord.

But at home, his wife lamented continually, saying, “Grain has come, yet not a handful is taken for our sustenance! You have plunged our household into ruin, sinking even the manure into the waters.” Villagers murmured, “Though the harvest is plentiful, the children in his house starve. What fate has given, he has given away, and so it has come to this for him.”

Yet Tukā, his heart brimming with divine joy, thought thus within himself: “The ancient temple of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga stands broken; let me repair it. Then there shall be a night-vigil with the sacred narration of the Lord’s glories.”

For the one who listens comes contemplation; contemplation leads to meditation; and from meditation comes direct realization—thus does the seeker’s knowledge ripen. Resolving thus in his heart, Tukā took a spade in his own hands and began clearing the mud and water from the site. Alone, he thought, “What can one man do? How shall this temple be rebuilt?” Even as this thought arose, Lord Paṇḍuraṅga sought to aid him in a wondrous manner.

That night, the Lord appeared in a dream to Mahādājī Paṇṭ, saying, “The grain you have stored—use it entirely for the temple’s restoration, without delay.” Upon awakening, Mahādājī, bowing to that command, went to the villagers and said, “In my dream I saw this: let us act swiftly.”

With wonder in their hearts, they came to see, and beheld Tukā at work, spade in hand, unearthing the walls. “A true vision has come to him,” they said, “let us help.” At once, five labourers were engaged, masons were brought, bricks and lime purchased; and with all working together, the temple was soon restored, the stored grain entirely spent in the work.

Yet the consecration day was near, and there was no grain for feeding the brāhmaṇas. Tukā was troubled, wondering what could be done. That night, the Lord of Rukmiṇī appeared again to Mahādājī Paṇṭ and said, “All in the village bear the five great sins. How did you judge without bringing this to mind? The farmer’s fields yielded abundance because of Tukā, yet he was deprived of his rightful share; and the grain kept for the temple watchman—why was it taken? Now, at least, call him to the village assembly, and even for the consecration feast, provide grain in full—then shall all be blessed.”

Awakening in awe, Mahādājī went to the assembly and related the dream. The villagers, astonished, said, “Indeed, a wrong has been done; the Lord of Rukmiṇī is displeased with us.” Calling the farmer, they said, “You reaped abundance, yet denied Tukā, and kept the watchman’s share. Why so?” The man replied, “Last night, I too saw in a dream that unless I give, the Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga will be displeased with me.” And so, without delay, he brought the required grain.

Others, hearing of this marvel, also brought offerings—some flour, some rice, some ghee, some jaggery, some vegetables and pulses—until all the materials were gathered in abundance.

On an auspicious day, the Lord’s deity was enthroned. With mantras, the brāhmaṇas bathed Him in the five sacred nectars; adorned Him with beautiful garments; anointed Him with sandalpaste, flowers, and tulasī garlands; and offered incense, lamps, and food. Tukā, filled with overflowing love, danced in the temple hall, a joy so wondrous that words cannot tell. Circumambulations were made, the brāhmaṇas were seated and fed, and offerings with betel leaves and dakṣiṇā were given.

Thus was the temple consecration completed to Tukā’s joy. Daily he worshipped the manifest form of the Lord, with ever-renewed delight. He cherished in his heart the wish to perform kīrtana with his own body and voice, taking to heart the words of the ancient saints. Though earlier he had made no study, now his mind was filled with longing. From among the countless abhaṅgas of Saint Nāmadeva, he selected and learned them by heart, singing and dancing as he recited. On days sacred to the Lord, he fasted, and kept night-vigils in the company of saints, immersed in the praise of the Lord’s holy name.

Having observed the sacred fast of Dvādaśī, Tukā would duly break it, offering food to the brāhmaṇas according to his means. He organized the dindī processions, displaying banners, and prepared the sacred insignia of the Vaiṣṇavas.

In time, he came upon the holy writings of other saints, among them the words of the renowned devotee Kabīr, himself born among the Yavanas. Tukā learned these nectarean

sayings by heart, reciting them with love. He also obtained the pure, complete editions of the lofty spiritual works spoken by Śrī Jnāneśvara himself, the crown among the wise Vaiṣṇavas.

Likewise, he secured the noble writings of Śrī Eknātha, the very avatāra of Lord Viṣṇu, who had composed a great commentary on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Seeking a fine and accurate copy of this work, Tukā spared no effort until he obtained it.

To meditate upon these scriptures, he chose a place of seclusion—the lovely Bhāṇḍār Mountain—where he would go and sit for study. There he would recite the texts from beginning to end, bringing their meanings into his meditation. A master in previous spiritual practice, and blessed with the gift of leading souls to liberation, he found that learning the texts required little strain; day and night, letters seemed to rest upon his tongue.

He also committed to memory the graceful utterances of Eknātha in his devotional rendering of the Rāmāyaṇa, reciting them out of pure love. With like devotion, he studied the delightful stories of Śrī Bhagavatī as narrated by great souls, for they revealed the wondrous pastimes of Śrī Hari.

He delved deeply into the Yogavāsiṣṭha and the Amṛtānubhava, both illumined by the words of Śrī Jnāneśvara, searching out their meanings with care. He listened to many Purāṇas and meditated upon them faithfully, so that worldly entanglements were forgotten.

For the mind that is impure, even if one sits in solitude for worship, worldly desires will wander through the mind like wild beasts roaming the forest. But Tukā's mind was not of this nature—first he strove for purity of heart, and then sought solitude for the study and contemplation of scripture.

Yet when he sat upon Bhāṇḍār Mountain, life there was far from easy. The cause was this: his wife, as people everywhere would say, was of a stern and difficult nature. But despite her ways, her heart was bound in loyalty to her husband, and she would not eat without him.

Each day she would carry a flatbread and a gourd of water up the mountain—a journey of a league and a half—until she was utterly wearied. Though she cherished her husband, she opposed the Lord's service, refusing to visit the temple, saying, "I will not let that dark one set eyes upon me."

She would say, "Our ancestor Viśvambhara brought forth the claim of this Lord into our family, and by that connection my husband has been driven mad. With so many children to feed and clothe, he has abandoned the household upon me, and gone to sit upon a mountain. Four hours into the night he comes home, only to dance before the dark Lord, joining in the tumult.

“At dawn he bathes and worships that same deity. What debt from some past birth compels him to repay it thus? We live near the village, where one could receive a dry loaf without such trouble, yet he causes me endless toil in this ceaseless carrying.”

Thus did Tukā’s wife dwell in constant worry at home. Seeing her distress, compassion arose in the heart of Paṇḍhari-nātha, the Lord Viṭhobā, Protector of the helpless. He said, “Tukā sits upon the mountain, and she is troubled in many ways. Let me now bring an end to this weary labour of hers; I shall reveal a certain event to make it so.”

Thus resolved, the Lord Cakrapāṇi performed His divine sport that very day. Tukā’s wife was carrying a single flatbread and a gourd full of water to the mountain. The heat was intense; it was midday, two watches past sunrise.

O faithful listener, hear now the marvel that Śrī Sāraṅgadhara wrought. As she journeyed along the path, her eyes fell upon the mountain in the distance, and she thought, “How far is still left to go! The heat grows unbearable.”

Her feet found no comfort upon the rough path; sharp stones cut her soles, and the pain made her spirit falter. Then another hindrance arose: upon the path lay a great karvandā thorn. When her foot struck it, the skin broke and blood flowed freely.

Overcome by pain, she collapsed upon the ground in a faint, and the gourd full of water slipped from her hand, spilling its contents upon the earth.

Opening her eyes, she looked down at her foot and saw that blood was flowing from it. “What am I to do now?” she cried aloud in distress. “This enmity from a former birth has followed me unerringly; and now, because my husband has seated himself as the Lord’s claimant, I must endure ceaseless hardship in worldly life. He has tied a necklace of suffering around my neck, while he himself sits far away, dwelling in solitude on the mountain.”

Thus lamenting, she tried to pull out the thorn, but it would not come, however much she tugged. “What remedy can I now attempt?” she thought. “This strange destiny of mine was written by fate long ago; not even at the end of the ages will it be altered, so I must bear the sorrow ordained by my past deeds. My father spent much wealth to arrange my marriage, but it is as though I were given into the keeping of a demon. At last, fate has chosen this for me.

“Once, bound to my husband, I went to the great pilgrimage with ease, and whatever merit arose then has not stood firm—it has brought me only shame in the world. My father-in-law spent freely, even matching my weight with gifts, but there too I never received enough to fill my stomach. All that merit has gone in vain.

“So does this wretched woman dwell in grief, yet never calling upon the Lord, saying within herself, ‘If my rival, the black one of Rukmiṇī, should hear of this, He would surely laugh at my plight.’ If He were to come suddenly, it would be only to mock me. Day and night I scold

my husband; if this thorn were broken, he would rejoice—therefore let this happen in my time, that he may take pleasure in my pain.

“In misfortune’s hour one must bear one’s own suffering, but never reveal it to an enemy—for such is the way of life. My mind longs for worldly comfort, yet people everywhere speak ill of me, saying my parents’ womb bore only a useless trouble-maker. I must never let my adversary know my weakness, for then he would draw my very life-breath to himself, and I would never seek refuge in him.”

Resolving thus, she wept softly to herself, still trying in vain to draw out the thorn. “What can be done?” she thought. The Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, knowing all, said within Himself, “Tukā sits fasting upon the mountain, but his wife suffers thus—therefore I, Śrī Hari, will come to her.”

And so the dark, tender-limbed Lord, lotus-eyed and clad in a divine yellow garment, appeared before her. Upon His head shone a crown set with many jewels, each dazzling the sun; in His ears glimmered divine earrings; on His neck rested the Kaustubha gem and the Vaijayantī garland; on His feet tinkled golden anklets that sang as He moved.

Suddenly beholding Him, Avlī thought, “Here comes that black meddler—my husband’s madness made manifest—bringing misfortune into my household!” Fearing mockery at her pitiable state, she quickly turned her moon-like face to the west. But the Lord, in His playful sport, stood before her in every direction; wherever she turned, He was there, lacking nothing in form or splendour.

Seeing this, listeners might well ask in their hearts, “Avlī had no loving devotion, but only enmity—ever scorning the Lord—so why would God grant her His vision?” Such a doubt is worthy of removal.

The speaker replies with joy: “Often in ages past the Lord has appeared to those moved not by love, but by enmity. When sought with loving devotion, Rāmacandra does not easily come to the mind; but with hatred in his heart, Rāvaṇa saw Rāma in every quarter of Laṅkā. So too Kaṃsa, saying that Kṛṣṇa was his sole enemy, found Śrī Hari never absent from his sight.

“In the same way, Tukā’s wife, saying, ‘I will not look upon that dark one,’ became the very object of His sport; and so He appeared around her without her effort, even as an deity of Viṣṇu set within a mirror shows the Lord in every direction the gaze may turn. Even when she closed her eyes in weariness, the Lord of the universe was there within.

“Without holding any wish in her heart, she complained: ‘Why does this enemy come before my eyes for no reason? Why does He follow me?’—and so she muttered within herself.”

Seeing the state of Avali, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha spoke within Himself, “The same love with which she once drew Me to her, I must now employ to bring her peace.”

Then, manifesting before her, the Lord of Paṇḍharī gently consoled her, placing His own hand upon her in assurance. “You are My own daughter indeed,” He said tenderly, “let no trace of duality dwell in your mind. You call Me an offender—yet what enmity have I ever borne towards you? You say that Tukā has forsaken you for another, yet this is but a vain reproach. When the fruit is fully ripened and detaches from its stem, the merest breeze will cause it to fall; so too has this turn of destiny come upon Me through Tukā’s own course.”

He continued, “Fixing his mind upon the Name, he wandered into the forests. And wherever he went, I ever followed close behind. You have no food to eat, and so I brought the harvest to you. Yet Tukā will not touch the grain—how then am I at fault?”

Thus speaking, the Lord of Paṇḍharpur seated Himself and took Avali’s foot upon His lap. With care He removed the thorn that had pierced her, and instantly there remained not the slightest trace of pain. At the touch of the Lord’s compassionate gaze, all her former distress was forgotten. Such is that tender-hearted, enchanting Lord of all gods—whose inner mood remains unfathomable even to Brahmā and the other deities.

Avālī then said, “I have been greatly delayed. A young calf is tethered up on the hill—let us go there at once!” Saying this, she placed the basket upon her head and hastened away, Jijāī following her closely.

As they approached the hill, Tukā opened his eyes and beheld them, and in the depths of his being he was filled with wonder. “This,” he thought, “is a marvel beyond compare—night and day dwelling together in one place, or the ocean and Agastya-ṛṣi meeting as one. The learned scholar and the goatherd have become companions; poison and nectar have mingled; the hawk and the royal swan are found in friendship together—such is this boundless wonder, Avālī in the company of the Serpent-Bed Lord!”

Thus speaking, the Vaiṣṇavas rejoiced greatly, for a long-standing quarrel had been removed. They reflected, “Domestic strife is a grievous thing, disturbing the mind at every moment. But now that Avālī has met the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, our hearts are at peace.”

In such manner, the loving devotion of the saints overflowed with joy. Soon Avālī and the dark-hued Lord came and stood near. Tukā, rising in haste, clasped the feet of Śrī Hari, and at once the Lord, full of eightfold majesty, raised him up in affectionate embrace, his voice faltering with devotion.

The Life of the worlds, Avālī, sat at ease with the two, and the Lord’s beloved devotee said to her, “Will you now serve Viṭhobā with food?” Hearing this, Avālī’s heart was filled with modesty. “I have but a single bhākar inside,” she thought, “how shall it suffice for the two?” Inwardly she felt great distress. “Even here,” she thought, “Kālya has taken my part away! He appears strong and well-fed to my eyes—how am I to manage this now?”

Thus musing, she nevertheless placed the bhākar upon the Lord's plate. Not the least morsel was withheld, and Sārangadhara was well-pleased. Seeing her guileless devotion, the Lord produced foods of many kinds, filling the basket and covering it with a cloth.

Once, when Śrī Kṛṣṇa was hungry, Draupadī served Him a mere leaf with a trace of seasoning, and He was fully satisfied, yet brought forth abundant food of every variety. In the same way, though Avālī's offering was meagre, the Serpent-Bed Lord was pleased, even with the remnant from her opposition. Then He said to her, "Will you not serve Tukā with equal eagerness?"

At these words from the beloved of Rukmiṇī, Jijāī, modest at heart, removed the cloth, and behold! the basket was brimming with cooked delicacies. Utterly amazed, she thought within herself, "The guardian deity of my lineage has come to me! Whether Bhairava, Khaṇḍobā, or Bhavānī—they too must have come to my aid."

"Whose handiwork is this?" she wondered. "Whoever has upheld my honour in this way, to that one I surrender myself in body and soul." Perceiving Avālī's thought, the beloved of Rukmiṇī said gently, "He to whom you have surely surrendered is none other than I, the Infinite, though you do not yet recognise Me. The food was created before your very eyes—know truly that it is My own doing." Yet even as the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha spoke thus, it seemed to her incredible.

Such was the Lord's infinite power, yet He had once partaken of the simple greens cooked by Vidura's wife, and had accepted the leaf-plate of Draupadī after she had rinsed her hands. It is the glory of the Lord to accept the humblest offering from the heart of His devotee. Just as the world sings of the piety of the cowherd maid Sabari, who without hesitation offered the fruits she had already tasted, so also the Lord, though the sovereign of all, deems the love of His devotee as the highest treasure.

Even though the Lord of Dvārakā possessed the wealth of countless kings, He had once left the palace of a great ruler to visit the humble cows of His dear devotee Chokhāmeḷā, and to partake of food at his dwelling. Such thoughts arose in Tukārām's heart as he, with deep humility, placed the food into two vessels—one for the Lord and one for Avlībāī.

At that time, Avlībāī's foot struck a thorn, and she stumbled. In that place, high upon the mountain, there was no trace of water anywhere nearby. She became anxious, wondering how she could serve the Lord without being able to wash her hands. Seeing her plight, the all-knowing Śrī Sāraṅgadhara spoke gently: "On the far side of this hollow, a deep affection for water seems to stir within the earth. There, a spring shall surely emerge. By the truth of My vow, this shall be so."

Taking His word as truth itself, Avlībāī lifted a shell from the ground—and to her astonishment, from within burst forth a pure, crystal stream. She marvelled at this unheard-of wonder: "In this dry wilderness, water has been placed—surely this is the Lord's doing. Who else could cause such a miracle?"

This was no ordinary feat. In ages past, learned sages had acquired mantras like those of Sabari, and with subtle arts had bewitched others. But here, the Lord Himself, without any artifice, had opened a spring to fulfil the pure service of His devotee. Filling the gourd with this sacred water, Avlībāī served it with her own hands to the Lord, while He in turn lovingly shared His meal with her.

The celestial beings, seated in their aerial chariots, descended to witness this marvel, exclaiming, "Blessed indeed is the glory of the devotee!" As they showered flowers from the sky, the Lord said to Tukārām: "O life of the world! Whoever partakes of My prasāda with love—without any agitation of mind—shall have My own yoga and siddhi granted to him."

Thus speaking, the Lord Himself placed a morsel into Tukārām's mouth, and sitting together with Avlībāī, the Supreme Soul, free from all duality, partook of the meal. Drinking deep of this nectar of Brahman in loving devotion, Tukārām was filled with supreme bliss. Then, after washing His hands, the Lord spoke again in tender affection:

"Listen, Tukā. Know that I, Janārdana, am filled in all beings. See Me pervading the moving and unmoving as gold pervades the ornaments. Just as a cloth cannot exist without its threads, so too the universe has no existence apart from Me. Realize this in your own experience. But henceforth, do not come alone to this mountain daily, for Avlībāī suffers much hardship. This is My word to you."

Hearing these words of the Compassionate One, Tukārām at once fell at His feet, saying: "I am Your child; therefore You take such tender care of me. I know not japa, tapa, nor the study of śāstra. I know not the eightfold yoga, nor the knowledge of Brahman. I am fallen in every way. But You are the Friend of the poor, the Lord of the shelterless—these titles are famed in the world. Your loving devotees sing them in kīrtan, and they are true, O Pāṇḍuraṅga!"

Hearing Tukārām's loving words, the ocean of mercy replied: "Does not a mother always protect her child? Such is My natural disposition. You are but an infant, even in your old age." Thus speaking, Madhusūdana embraced Tukārām.

The bliss hidden in the Lord's own heart—kept secret even from the wise—was freely bestowed upon Tukārām, seeing his pure devotion. In that state, there was no longer any distinction between God and devotee. The Lord of Vaikuṇṭha understood that Tukārām had attained oneness, and had poured water over the root of all duality, blending into Him as milk mixes with milk.

It was like the breath that moves within the body merging into the vast sky, or the fragrance hidden within a golden bud, or the sweetness that remains unseen within sugar. So too, Tukārām became one with the Lord; and in that union of love, all verbal teachings ceased.

Yet within his heart, Tukārām marvelled: "Whom shall I tell of this secret? Whom shall I embrace to share this joy? Now that I have come to union with the Lord, who will run to my aid—and whose virtues shall I then sing?"

Having understood the tender yearning of His devotee, the Compassionate Lord said to Tukā, "At the very moment when thou art lost in singing My kīrtan, dancing in bliss, I, dark as the raincloud, do verily stand there beside thee."

So speaking, the divine Friend of His devotees opened Tukā's inner eyes. Tukā beheld and, with all questions dissolved, experienced the supreme joy of direct communion with God, the delight of bhakti filling his being.

Such was the exchange between Lord and devotee, that even the gods seated in their celestial chariots bent low to hear these words. They said, "Behold Tukā, hero among Vaiṣṇavas! Through his devotion he rescues countless souls. We ourselves have long been wearied in many ways, though we hold the high seat of Indra. But Tukā has tasted the bliss of love, and by his bhakti has made Śrīpati Himself obedient to him."

Blessed, indeed, is this mortal world, whose glory appears greater still, for here on earth itself, with all means at hand, one enjoys the bliss that in heaven is but the fruit of merit. Blessed is this Bhāṇḍāra mountain, for on it the sacred feet of Pāṇḍuraṅga have trodden. Blessed is Dehu, the perfect holy place, for there a great Vaiṣṇava has taken birth. Blessed is the sacred Pancakośī of Paṇḍharpur; blessed are its stones and soil, for there the Consort of Lakṣmī has walked. Its glory is beyond words.

With such praises did the gods laud him, returning to heaven filled with wonder. Then, having spoken thus to Tukā in the sweetness of His love, Śrīpati disappeared from sight. Yet it seemed to me as though the lotus of Tukā's heart was full-blown, and in its midst, like a bee, Śrīhari abode, drawn by the nectar of pure love.

Or as if the ocean of a devotee's heart had become the Lord's play, where He, like a golden fish, sported, and where the conch-demon of ego was crushed completely by His own hand. Tukā's words, spoken with the grace of devotion, were such that the Vedas themselves would have arisen from them; they were not the fruit of any other mind.

Trusting in that truth, the great sages sang his praise. Holding fast to his utterance, the noble tradition of bhakti grew and spread. The glory of Tukā is immeasurable; no simile can match it. By the marvel of loving devotion, he made even the Supreme Person subject to him.

It is well known in the Purāṇas that the Buddha was an avatāra in the age of Kali; yet to fulfil Tukā's heart's desire, the Lord chose to appear in saguna form. Just as a calf of the wish-yielding cow is suckled lovingly without waiting for the appointed hour, or as one who sits beneath the kalpavṛkṣa has his rarest wish granted without asking or counting past births, even so the Lord, without any need of time or occasion, took on a pure, visible form and came at once to meet His devotee.

Such examples are many, though the clever listener may tire of them. Suffice it to say, meeting the Lord of the peacock emblem, Tukā entered the realm of Vaikuṇṭha.

Then, in the company of the saintly Avalī, the Vaiṣṇava Tukā came into the village. What transpired thereafter shall be heard in the next chapter, told with the sweetness of a loving friend.

As one who, by the force of the wind, hides the stalks of grass, yet to onlookers appears a farmer keeping watch in his field, so too does the Lord sometimes seem as though He were merely the poet's skill. The wise know this is not so, for it is Pāṇḍuraṅga Himself who, with tender art, narrates the lives of His saints, using the poet as a means to nourish them.

Thus ends the thirtieth chapter of Śrī Bhaktalīlāmṛta, a sweet fulfilment to the longing of all loving devotees who listen.

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Chapter 31

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ. Invoking the auspicious name of Śrī Gaṇeśa, the narration begins with the humble confession of the devotee's heart.

Apart from the repetition of Thy holy Name, O Lord Śrīpati, I know of no other means to attain Thee. Practices of japa, austerities, and many forms of ritual observances are spoken of in the scriptures, yet none of these are truly known to me, nor have I the power to perform them. Even if a vow is undertaken according to sacred injunctions, the pangs of hunger soon disturb the body; and though I may desire to undertake a pilgrimage, this frail frame is without strength to travel. To attain Thee, O Śrīhari, it is said one must give alms to the worthy, but my hands hold no wealth in abundance—how then shall such deeds be accomplished?

It is declared that all things, moving and unmoving, should be seen as Thy manifestation, yet in my vision the play of merits and faults still appears; the mind has not yet reached that perfect evenness. The scriptures advise the study of the śruti to know the truth, but my understanding is like that of a child, unripe and untrained. Even when I open the holy books, the mind refuses to dwell upon them with deep faith.

Yet, there is one thing to which my heart clings steadfastly—the noble company of Thy saints. Bound by the cords of love to their holy narratives, I pray that, casting upon me Thy gracious glance, Thou mayest lead me across this ocean of worldly existence. In the previous chapter it was told how the thorn in the path was removed, and thus, after freeing Rukmiṇī's beloved from hindrance, the Lord came swiftly to meet Tukā.

Arriving in the village, Tukā devoted himself to the service of Vaiṣṇava devotees. He would receive them with great honour, washing their feet with his own hands, and the water thus sanctified he would sip with reverence, deeming even the bliss of Brahman to be lesser than this nectar. In his heart he firmly resolved that all the sacred waters dwell at the feet of the saints. He would adorn the Vaiṣṇava heroes with garlands of tulasī and flowers, worshipping them as he would the Lord Himself. Likewise, he honoured the noble Brāhmaṇas with the same devotional regard.

If ever he heard of a hungry Vaiṣṇava or Brāhmaṇa, he would spare no effort to serve them a meal with due respect. Beyond such service to saints, he considered no other spiritual discipline necessary, holding their words as his sole guiding principle. When the saints sang kīrtana, Tukā would join with the dhruvapada refrain, thus absorbing the essence of their songs, and later reflecting upon it in solitude.

Even after receiving the vision of Rukmiṇī's beloved, Tukā continued to render service—picking stones from the dancing ground so the Vaiṣṇava heroes might rejoice unhurt in their devotion. In gatherings of kīrtana he would hold the lamp so the Lord's Name might shine in the hearts of all, untroubled by any worldly hesitation. When the saints were seated, he

would reverently care for the place around their feet, and when they departed, he would bow deeply before them.

In the fervour of the kīrtana, his voice would choke with emotion, his eyes brimming with tears. Crying out the Lord's Name with a lion's roar, he would tell the people with love that illusion had perished, leaving only the companionship of Viṭhobā's Name. Every mark described in the Śrībhāgavata as belonging to a true devotee was manifest in Tukā without the least deficiency. Seeing this, the people said that he had become intoxicated with love for the Lord, speaking ceaselessly day and night.

Truthfulness, charity, and compassion for all beings dwelt within him. If any man or woman sought his help, he would hasten to serve them with his own body. If any distressed soul desired some small thing and it was within his reach, he would freely give it, never deceiving anyone in thought, word, or deed. From his own lips he would speak the highest knowledge—"I am verily the perfect Brahman"—yet he would gladly risk his very life for the sake of a single coin for another's need. His conduct was not mere words; he lived exactly as he spoke, seeing the entire world as his own Self, and never perceiving duality even in dream.

If his own children wept before him, or those of others, he felt the same tenderness for both—this, indeed, is the sign of a saint. If robbers carried away his wealth, he harboured not the least sorrow in his mind. Whether a king offered him gems and jewels, or a pauper brought him leaves and vegetables, he regarded both with equal vision. Whether praised with lofty words or reviled with harsh ones, his mind felt neither elation nor grief.

One day, as his wife was bathing, she had but a single garment, an old cloth, which she had washed and hung to dry upon the wall. Outside, a noble Vaiṣṇava sat, absorbed in loving devotion, his heart filled with nothing but Rukmiṇī's Lord. At that moment, a frail Brāhmaṇa woman came there in great distress, entreating, "If you will give me but one cloth, you will gain immeasurable merit. The life of a Brāhmaṇa's household is full of hardship, and I have nothing else to cover myself. Even if you have an old, worn cloth, please give it to me at once."

Hearing her plea, Tukā's heart was moved with compassion. By a subtle gesture he showed her where the cloth was kept, saying, "Take it." At that time his wife was bathing in the courtyard, the cloth hanging on the wall. The Brāhmaṇa woman quickly took it and departed, her heart content, blessing him with the words, "May Rukmiṇī's Lord grant you His grace."

Tukā quietly urged her to go without delay, and himself went promptly upon his way. Soon, sitting by the banks of the Indrāyaṇī, he was singing his garland of bhajans with love, while in the house an unexpected scene unfolded.

When Jijābāī finished her bath, she looked for the garment but found it gone. Amazed, she thought, "Alas, my fortune is ill; some strong hand has taken it away before my eyes." She imagined in her mind how it must have happened. There was no maidservant in the house,

for she had gone far to fetch cow-dung cakes; little Gaṅgā was playing outside. Her heart was troubled and perplexed.

On that day, Mahādeva had gone for his bath, taking with him little Viṭhobā. The boy, imitating the ways of his elders, lingered long in play and did not return quickly. In the village there was one afflicted with leprosy; they said of him that even his wife bore the same disease, with at least five sores upon her body, and thus people would speak ill of her in the streets. Since the day she had been taken by her in-laws from Kāśī and the banks of the Bhāgīrathī, there was none in the house to guard her honour, and she would be given away to strangers without thought.

At that time Dādulā was seated within the house, and a Brāhmaṇa woman came, asking for a cloth. I too heard her voice clearly. It was as though a vulture had let go of its prey, only to cast it upon thorns; for there was but one cloth in the house, and giving it away, he had quickly departed. Thus, the sly one had slipped away, just as a scorpion, having done its mischief, hides itself in some corner.

Ordinarily, when he went outside, people would call out his name in mockery, so this day he had remained silent, mindful of his past wrongs. A thief who devours the livelihood of others had seated himself in the rear of the house, nursing his enmity. He was no true husband, but one with whom the ties of a former birth had brought me into this present bond.

Then some wretched woman, posing as a Brāhmaṇa's wife, came and, receiving the cloth, departed without a word to me. My father, Āpājī, had once given such a garment, and I have never even eaten food alongside the man who now claims to be my lord. Bound with a black bead necklace, he had died in vain as my master, and his ways were well known to all—he had brought the household to ruin. Ever calling out for food, he had no shame even in famine, when one poor woman had perished of hunger, yet he still showed his face in public.

Through the accumulated merit of Rukhumāī, I had been spared from sharing in his lot, for a heavier misfortune would surely have befallen me. And now, even to step out of the house was impossible, for the people of the village would face me directly. I knew no remedy, and sorrow pressed heavily upon my heart.

Just then, my kin by marriage came to summon me for a wedding, and they all entered the house together, calling, "Jījābāī, come out!" But I, having no garment, sat naked upon the grinding stone, my heart overcome with shame. I thought, "If the claimant to my name were at home, perhaps I could cover my face with the veil, but now, in this moment, what can be done?"

The slanderer had hurried to the gathering-place of men, and there, kindling the fire of scandal, added fuel to it with falsehood. His malice and my grief, mingled with the affection once shared, struck hard upon me. Fed with the fuel of love, fanned by the wind of delusion,

the flames of shame burned fiercely, agitating my heart. Consumed by the threefold torment of body, mind, and fate, I thought in despair, “What can I do now?”

At that moment, Viṭhābāī, the Mother, came running in. In wondrous compassion she cast upon me her divine yellow robe. Thus did Rukmiṇī’s beloved, the ocean of mercy, protect the honour of His servant’s wife. It seemed to me that in this manner the Lord Himself had hastened to relieve Avallī, burning in the fire of affliction, by pouring over her the cool, sheltering cloud of His grace.

Beholding the heavenly garment, I was filled with wonder, saying to myself, “Surely, this is the doing of my Kālyā; apart from him, who else could accomplish such a thing?” Yet I murmured within, “Though he shows so many marvels, what good does it do me? He has driven my husband mad; that is all.” Repeatedly, I turned the thought over in my mind.

Donning the divine cloth without delay, I entered the house, and at once its radiance filled the temple, to the amazement of the slanderers. They said among themselves, “We have seen many rich garments, but never such a wondrous robe as this. Tukā must have robbed some household to obtain a yellow robe for his wife!”

Thus, while the family affairs went on within, he appeared outside to the people as if in deep, motionless meditation, showing himself the very personification of renunciation. The brilliance of the robe dazzled their eyes, and its fragrance spread even to the temple. They marvelled greatly. One said, “Perhaps it had long been hidden away in a chest, and today they have brought it out for her to wear. None can fathom the end of Tukā’s ways.”

Thus speaking among themselves, they turned to Jījābāī and said, “All is well with you now; come quickly, for it is time to go to the wedding.”

Once, Mahadev went to bathe, taking Vitthal along with him. Observing the ways of his father, Vitthal lingered long, sitting there. In those times, it was said among people that leprosy, if left unchecked, would be evident by at least five spots upon the body; hence, they claimed one should not eat from such unclean place, and such talk spread openly among the townsfolk. Since the day the wise elders of Kashi and Bhagirathi—both his in-laws—had departed this world, there had been none left at home to guard the household, and the little that was there would sometimes fall into the hands of strangers.

One day, a Brahmin’s wife came to beg for cloth from Dadu, who was seated in the house. I too heard her call aloud for alms. Unfortunately, malice had already cast away its restraint, as if a thorn had been driven deep into the flesh. There was but one garment in the home, yet he gave it to her at once and fled. The dark-faced death to marital harmony had thus arrived, and he avoided her presence, hiding away as a scorpion hides after unjustly striking.

At other times, when he went out, people would shout at him by name, calling him a sinner; hence, that day he kept silent, dwelling upon past wrongs. Like a habitual thief, the slanderer

sat close behind, nurturing enmity, not as a true claimant to her companionship, but as one who had brought this hostility from a past birth.

Then came a wretched woman, the Brahmin's wife, who upon receiving the cloth, departed without a word to me and sat elsewhere, evading me. My own father, Appaji, had once taken that garment, and I had never partaken of food alongside it. Around his neck hung black beads, yet in vain—he had fallen to ruin, bankrupt of virtue, and I knew well the works of his hands. Even during famine, when a neighbor's wife had perished, he felt no shame nor conscience, and still showed his face among people.

By Rakhumai's own merit, she had departed before me; she was thus spared the heavy affliction that was now to fall upon me. Whenever I thought of entering the house, the village folk would stand before me, and no other remedy would come to mind but grief. At that time, both my kin and my husband's relatives came together to see to a marriage, and they all called to me, saying, "Jijai, come forth!"

Hearing this, all the people entered the house. There I sat upon a grinding stone, naked, my heart overcome with shame. I thought within myself, "Were the true husband at home, he would shield me from this dishonor. But what am I to do now, in this moment?" Malice was present nearby, fanning the flames of fear, adding sorrow and false affection, striking me grievously. The fire of the threefold suffering burned in me; the fuel of love fed it, the wind of delusion whipped it, and the flames of shame licked my body until my mind grew restless.

In such torment, Avli thought, "What shall I do?" At once, Vithabai came running, and with tender compassion performed a wondrous act—behind her was the yellow silken robe of the Lord, which she quickly cast upon me, shielding my modesty like Rukmini herself. In my mind it seemed that Avli, scorched by the triple fire, was suddenly covered by the cool cloud of Rukmini's Lord, who came swiftly to her rescue.

Beholding the divine garment, I was astonished, and said within myself, "This is surely the doing of my Kaliya; none else could have done this." Though he shows countless miracles, I wondered what benefit such deeds brought me, for he had driven my own husband to madness. Quickly I put on that celestial cloth and entered the house without delay, its radiance casting light even in the temple, to the amazement of the slanderers.

They said, "We have seen many fine garments, but never such a robe of yellow silk! Tukaram has surely robbed someone's home to give this to his wife!" They mocked further, saying, "He keeps his home in want, yet displays this wealth to the people outside. Now he sits in a fool's trance—look at Tukaram the ascetic!"

The brilliance of the robe dazzled their eyes, its fragrance filled the temple, and they were bewildered. Some said, "This must have been stored away secretly in a chest until now, and has just been taken out to wear." None could fathom the mystery of Tukaram's ways. Speaking thus to one another, they pressed Jijai to come quickly for the marriage rites.

Avli, however, said to them, “You do not know our plight. My husband has renounced all worldly hopes and has become as one beyond the body.” Hearing this, the slanderers asked bluntly, “Will you come for the wedding or not? Speak plainly.” Knowing the weakness of worldly life, they whispered among themselves, “From where will she bring the wedding gifts?”

Their show of honor was as fleeting as the shadow of a cloud, gone in a moment; or like a moth that delights in color from afar but is destroyed when it comes near the flame; or like the single-minded stillness of a crane, deceptive in its intent; or like a blossom that looks lovely from a distance but stinks when brought to the nose; or like gold plating that hides base copper within. Such was the false respect of the slanderers.

Perceiving their utter insincerity, Avli answered, “If the household were truly in order, then I would surely come.” Thus she dismissed them, and they left. Thereafter, the events unfolded with subtle wisdom. Tukaram, having given away the Brahmin’s garment, received bitter reproach from Avli. Therefore, the Vaishnava hero went at once into the forest, sat in serene posture, and brought before his mind the form of Panduranga, praying, “O Lord of Rukmini, heed my plea. Remove all sin and make me an deity fit for Your service. O savior of the fallen, ocean of mercy, I offer this supplication to You. I am a heap of all sins, yet I sit at Your feet in service. If any punishment should come for my wrongs, let it befall me, Lord. Outwardly I claim to be Yours, yet I have turned this world to dust and dirt. But You, Vitthala, know the thief that hides within me.”

With such repentance, he sang in loving devotion. Four watches of the night passed, and he came to the temple. With cymbals of stone in hand, he danced in joy. The temple being near his home, Avli said to all, “He has come.” Knowing that the Lord had Himself robed him in yellow silk, her anger melted away, and she sent him bread and vegetables by the hand of Lenki.

He took that simple meal with love and stood in the kirtan, where the faithful gathered to hear the Lord’s stories. Until the second watch of the night he sang, after which the people returned to their homes. But Tukaram would not sleep; he sat alone in the temple, reciting the words of saints and committing their abhangas to heart. By day he served in the forest, by night he sang kirtan for two watches.

Sleep would come again and again, but he rubbed his eyes and kept awake. Casting away ego, he attained self-realization, yet the body’s nature did not depart entirely—it continued by habit, as fragrance lingers for a moment after camphor is burnt, or as a potter’s wheel spins for a time after the stick is withdrawn, or as the leaves of a tree tremble a while after the wind has stilled, or as twilight lingers for four watches after sunset.

Thus, sleep would return often, and to conquer it, the Vaishnava hero tied a rope to his shikha and fastened it above, saying, “If I nod, this will pull my head up and drive sleep away.” In this way, for four days, he conquered sleep entirely, never allowing sloth to enter

his mind, and keeping the discipline of the Lord's service. His ears heard no unworthy word, his eyes saw no unworthy sight, and his tongue spoke no unworthy speech—such were the noble qualities of Tukaram.

The mind of man, by its very nature, is never steadfast for long. If it remains restless, the worship of Lord Viṣṇu slips beyond his grasp. Yet, when one's feet hasten to serve others, countless merits gather to his credit. The man who delights in helping others carries with him a purity born of many good births. Even then, in the course of life, the body may suffer ailments, and he must endure various remedies — yet such a soul remains blessed in spirit.

Tukārām says that this disinterested and selfless nature is indeed the path to attain the Lord of Rukmiṇī. But how can one acquire such power to serve others without selfish motive? Listen well. If a traveller, unknown and unannounced, meets you upon the road, and if he bears a heavy burden, lift it upon your own head for a while, allowing him even a moment's rest. If, during the monsoon, travellers arrive seeking shelter in the village, guide them at once to the public rest-house or the temple; or, if such be absent, take them into your own home without delay.

When pilgrims, journeying long, come with swollen and aching feet, wash them gently with warm water, massage their limbs, and bring relief to their bodies. If cows or bulls, weakened from thirst, are abandoned by a cruel master, stroke them tenderly with your hands and give them grass and water. In a corner of the house, keep ready flour, sugar, and ghee, and pour them into the ant-hills daily, offering them to God through the tiny creatures that dwell there. Let your compassion extend to all beings, from the greatest to the smallest speck of life; let no act of violence be agreeable to your mind, even for a moment.

Yet, even one of such tender heart may, if careless, slip suddenly into sin; and therefore, the soul must be ever alert, like a fish unable to survive outside the water. In the heat of summer, wave the fan over the devotees gathered for kīrtan, and if you see any person famished from want of food, strive at once to find him a meal. When thirsty travellers pass your way during the blazing heat, fill a pitcher quickly and place it along the roadside for their relief.

The greatest austerity of speech is to never utter falsehood; in every answer, speak only truth. In the service of others, keep your body ever ready, without the least trace of laziness. If a traveller falls sick upon the road and has no friend or kinsman nearby, give him refuge in the temple, and tend to his medicine and diet with care. The Bhāgavata speaks of the state of Jaḍabharata, and such indeed had Tukārām's own disposition become — for any worldly request or humble errand spoken to him, he would hasten to fulfil it without delay.

Casting away attachment and greed, he would instantly act upon whatever good was told him. Once, as he sat upon the bank of the Indrayāṇī, immersed in bhajan, some merchants passing along the high embankment of Navalākhyā called to him in jest, saying, "Come with us now!" And Tukārām, ever ready to serve, rose without hesitation and accompanied them.

All the while, his heart remained engaged in bhajan with deep love, never idle even for a moment.

At that time, there came along a feeble, aged Brāhmaṇa lady, her body worn by years and devoid of strength, walking slowly towards the market with the aid of a staff. Tukārām beheld her, and compassion welled up in his heart. Addressing her tenderly, he said, “Mother, you have grown weary with so much effort; come, sit behind me now.”

Hearing Tukaram’s gentle words, the Brahmin lady said to him, “If you can bring me some oil, I shall return to my home.”

With the tender insistence of a loving devotee, she won his consent, and Tukaram, ever ready to serve, gave her both the money and a vessel to carry it. The old woman went back to her house with joy blossoming in her heart, while Tukaram made his way toward the marketplace with the sole purpose of helping others.

There, the merchants would call him to assist in their work, and he would readily help them, all the while keeping his heart engaged in loving remembrance of the Lord. In him, devotion and practical service were perfectly blended in sattvic harmony. The next day, he brought the oil to the Brahmin lady. She received it gratefully, but said, “I have nothing with which to repay your kindness.”

Some days later, she began telling people of a strange wonder. “It was meant to be eight days’ worth of oil,” she said, “and it was Tukaram who brought it to me. But now so many days have passed, and the oil is not yet finished—it is a marvel to my mind.” As her words spread, some remarked in amazement, while others spoke with doubt. “He may be sincere,” said one, “but his own family must be hungry at home, and yet he feels no shame.” Others, however, considered it a miracle—that oil brought by Tukaram lasted far beyond its measure.

Those who cherished hope said to him, “Tukaram-sheth, please go again to the market and bring oil for our homes. We shall never forget your kindness.”

Smiling warmly, he agreed. He took many oil jars with him, tying a pouch to his neck in which everyone placed coins for the purchases. As he passed through villages, those who heard of his errand would place their offerings into his pouch, each one content at heart that it was in Tukaram’s care.

Sometimes he himself carried the jars, sometimes others hung them around his neck. Yet he never felt burdened—his mind was absorbed in the Lord, dwelling in a state beyond bodily awareness. Reaching the market swiftly, he went to the oilman’s shop, placing all the coins at his disposal.

The oilman asked, “In whose vessels shall I pour, and how much?”

Tukaram replied, “I do not know these details—do as you think best.”

While speaking thus, another merchant called for his help. Tukaram at once went to carry the loads, for it was getting late. With joyful readiness, he bore heavy bundles upon his head, and swiftly delivered goods to the market stalls.

To whatever work he was called, this Vaiṣṇava devotee responded promptly—bringing fodder and water for cattle, tying the loads firmly on their backs. Seeing even the lowly creatures as forms of God, he served them with love; no being was outside the reach of his compassion.

When night fell, he would go to the temple to lead kirtan. The devotees listened with deep affection, and their hearts were stirred to repentance and love. At dawn, as soon as he heard the merchants calling for work, he would run to them with eagerness. Moving through the village, he joyfully chanted the Lord's name, saying, "Without remembrance of Hari, this worldly life is wasted—do not squander it in vain."

He tied up loads quickly and carried them to each who required it, never growing weary in his heart despite the many kinds of work. Returning to the oilman, the latter said, "You have brought the right coins with care." Tukaram, the heroic Vaiṣṇava, gladly received the oil and set off at once.

On the way, people who sat chanting would recognize their own vessels and take them back. Yet the Lord of Rukmini delighted in this scene, listening attentively to His devotee's dealings. Though the oil was measured equally into each jar, Tukaram perceived no difference; still, in truth, each received according to the measure of his own means.

It is like the earth, where countless creatures die and their bodies turn to dust—yet in future births their past actions bring them forth in different forms. The earth remains impartial, but the Lord who reclines upon Śeṣa gives to each according to his destiny. So too, the saint's heart is perfectly even toward all, though by God's decree one may live in poverty, another in wealth.

Then, as the saintly Vaiṣṇava entered the sacred village of Dehu, he made his way straight to the temple, where, with deepest reverence, he bowed before the Lord. Gazing upon the dark-hued Śrīraṅga with eyes overflowing with love, his heart was filled with supreme bliss, like that of an infant who, after long separation, is pressed again into the bosom of its mother.

Soon, some villagers, recognizing the saint, came and swiftly led him away to their homes. But Avli, observing this, became firm in her misunderstanding and spoke harshly: "These foolish people have lost their senses! My husband has gone mad. They place in his hands a pestle and set him to some strange task—this is the doing of that evil spirit that possesses him." She compared it to loading a bull's burden upon a man, thinking that now, with her husband gone astray, the villagers were somehow taking pleasure.

In her anger, Avli quarrelled loudly, yet the people did not answer her words. They wondered why she spoke so, for the husband she criticized was the very one endowed with the greatest

of virtues. It is often seen in this world that the possessor of rare merit alone must bear the bonds of hardship. Even the white tail of a forest cow becomes an object of cutting simply because it is fair to behold.

They thought within themselves: “Why should there be confinement for the one whom the king himself honors and the chiefs revere? Why must virtue itself be bound?” Just as a dervish, in humility, might salute the people yet be mocked by them as a wandering monkey, so too was this noble soul, moving freely from house to house, misunderstood.

Thus, some came to Jijābāī and said, “Your husband has become a vidēhī—a man beyond the body.” Even if explained in the gentlest manner, the people could not grasp the truth. They told her how, in the oil-press, he would fill the vessels with perfect care, a marvel to behold, and how, because of this, the villagers often entrusted him with such work.

But Avli thought within herself: “This Tuka appears to be mad, and yet why should these people come and speak so much to me? When we ourselves have but little, why should there be quarrel over another’s possessions?” Hearing such reflections, her wrath cooled and she became silent, realizing that her own thoughts had been false and that she had been shamed before the people.

Such indeed was the state of Tukā, whose wife regarded him according to the ordinary nature of womankind, while to the devotees he appeared as none other than Pāṇḍuraṅga Himself, compassion embodied. In the mornings, he would rise early and carry water to the homes of the brāhmaṇas, sweeping and sprinkling the courtyards and thresholds clean.

If he saw a violent bird seize some prey, his heart could not bear the sight. With gentle words and humble appeals, he would free the creature, showing mercy in countless ways. To the sādhus and saints, he was a devoted servant, walking joyfully in their paths. He regarded the remnants of their food as nectar, fit to be honored as the very essence of Brahman.

Indeed, in the Śrī Bhāgavatam are described the marks of true devotees, and every one of these signs was perfectly present in Tukā without exception. But Avli, still enveloped in ignorance, kept herself apart from him, often speaking to him with harsh and cutting words, day and night.

One day, Jijābāī came to Tukā and said with certainty: “Today is the sacred death-anniversary of your father, yet there is not even a little provision for the ritual offerings.”

Hearing these words, the noble Vaishnava hero, Tukaram, replied with affection, “I shall go swiftly to the forest and gather fresh vegetables. I will bring them in abundance, so that they may be cooked and offered to the ancestors.” Thus speaking, he joyfully raised his voice in the chanting of Vitthal’s name, and making his way into the forest, his heart was absorbed in the remembrance of the Lord of Vaikuntha.

Fixing the deity of Panduranga in the eye of his mind, he gazed with both eyes upon that divine form within his meditation. His heart, overflowing with love, melted into a stream of

compassion, and in that inner stillness, he offered his prayer: “Victory, victory to You, O consort of Rukmini, beloved of Your devotees, ocean of mercy! O purifier of the fallen, uplifter of the meek, compassionate Lord Vitthal! With body, speech, and mind, I have taken refuge in You. You alone are my dearest kinsman, the one who shields me from every harm. I have tested the supports of this world and found them wanting; they only deepen the pain in countless ways. Renouncing all faith in what perishes, I seek shelter at Your feet, O beloved of Rukmini. Now I place every burden upon Your head—may You, in Your grace, bear them for me.”

Speaking thus, the loving devotee went on his way. Before him lay fields of ripened wheat, where laborers were busy with the harvest. They greeted Tukaram playfully, asking why he did not come to help them uproot the stalks. Smiling, he replied lightly and joined them, not for the wage or the work, but stringing together garlands of the Lord’s name, even as the others toiled in worldly labor. Though his hands might touch the work, his heart was unstained, wholly absorbed in the remembrance of God.

Yet he did not even keep in mind the purpose for which he had entered the forest—to bring vegetables for the household. His wife, Jijabai, awaited him at home, but in his heart there was no thought of returning, for his mind was bound fast in the name and form of the Lord. Nourished daily on the food of love, he appeared ever full and strong.

Meanwhile, at home, Jijabai’s temper rose. “The wretched man has gone out again at dawn! What manner of husband have I, that I must labor to provide cloth and grain for this house? The ancestors have been announced for today, and he roams the woods as though nothing concerns him.” She complained further, “He has strength enough to labor for others, but to fulfill his duties here—there is no bond between us. Why should I remain in this worldly life with such a one?”

Her lamentation reached the ears of Panduranga in Pandharpur. The Lord thought, “It does not befit Me that My true devotee should fall short in any way, for to serve My servants with undivided love is My constant vow.” And so, determining to act, the Lord Himself assumed the form of Tukaram, placing upon His own head a great bundle of provisions, and walked towards the devotee’s house.

That same Supreme Being who is the object of the yogis’ deepest meditation, the blue-throated Lord of all worship, now bore a humble load for the sake of His devotee. He who rests upon the ocean of milk, whose feet are adored by Lakshmi herself, now carried grain upon His head. He whom Brahma and the great sages worship day and night did not keep even a trace of pride, but took up the labor with His own divine body. With the eight mystic perfections at His command, He who is the master of Goddess Indira walked with full effort, like an ordinary man, through the streets of Dehu.

Arriving, He set down the bundle and addressed Jijabai, “Take this quickly, prepare the cooking with your own hands. I will go out at once to gather the utensils.” Speaking thus, the Lord of Vaikuntha hurried away.

Jijabai came out, untied the bundle, and was astonished. There lay every needed ingredient—flour, pulses, ghee, rice, sugar, vegetables, jaggery, cumin, ginger, pepper—all in perfect measure. She set about cooking at once, and in no time the divine helper returned, bearing the pots and pans. Then, assuming the role of the humble householder, He went through the village inviting all, saying, “Our household has the ancestors to honor today; please come swiftly for the meal.”

Seeing this, the people were filled with wonder and murmured among themselves, “Today Tukaram has turned his mind towards worldly affairs!”

With steadfast resolve, she declared, “What is truly eternal? Our household stores barely a morsel of food.” Unmindful, Tuka too spoke frankly and candidly, informing the entire village of their plight. Yet, amidst this, people of diverse backgrounds voiced varied opinions and spoke many words. They invited all to the feast, insisting that no one should leave without eating.

The appointed day arrived, and by mid-morning the preparations in the kitchen were complete with great haste. The servants went from house to house, inviting everyone far and near to partake of the meal. Upon reaching the banks of the Indrayani River, all gathered to bathe and purify themselves. With reverence, the servants provided each guest a seat, performing respectful worship to their guests as divine beings.

Turning away from all worldly concerns, those who came seeking refuge in the Lord were treated with utmost care and love. Their virtuous acts were fulfilled by the gracious Rukminikant, who bestowed boundless mercy upon them. With folded hands, flowers, fragrant tulsi leaves, and loving obeisance, he worshiped the guests as his own beloved. Meanwhile, Jijabai’s heart brimmed with joy and satisfaction, feeling honored by such auspicious hospitality.

Every dish prepared was carefully arranged and multiplied to fill the plates generously. Ghee was poured upon the rice served in honor of Lord Shesha, while all intentions of doubt or scarcity were cast away. With such abundant provisions made through the blessings of Lakshmi, the food became especially delicious. Though many ate their fill, none were left wanting, not even for a drop of water.

This sacred drama of divine play for the redemption of the world was enacted repeatedly with earnest prayers. All who came ate with relish whatever pleased their palate, accepting the food with gratitude. After performing ritual purification of the hands, the guests were served thirteen-fold portions of rice, which amazed all present. Overwhelmed, Avli spoke with wonder in her heart.

Jijabai declared from that day forth she would cast aside all worldly worries. She entrusted her mind wholly to Tuka, feeling a deep trust in his spiritual insight. Hearing this, Avli expressed doubts, saying there was no surety in such matters. Everyone then returned to their homes, contented and satisfied in their souls.

Many hungry souls also came to the great Mahar, seeking alms. To all, abundant food was distributed by the compassionate Rukminikant. Avli's heart overflowed with gratitude for the great blessing of food. After the meal, the vessels were gathered together, and Rukminikant spoke, instructing what was to be done next.

He ordered that the dishes be washed in the waters of the Indrayani. Then, carrying the clean vessels back to their rightful owners, the divine spirit became unseen, disappearing as mysteriously as it had appeared. Meanwhile, Tuka the devotee had harvested a great bounty of wheat, the farmers' benevolent gift, and filled four baskets with it.

With reverence, he lifted them to his head and returned home. When the season's first rains fell, the mosquitoes emerged in swarms. Though they bit all around, they left Tuka untouched, for his body was protected by the Lord's grace. He said this mortal frame is transient, to be used only in the service of others.

On the very day commemorating his father's death, all the mosquitoes gathered in the form of celestial beings. Declaring themselves to be Vaishnava devotees, they offered the sacrifice of the body unto Brahman. Witnessing this certainty within his heart, the Lord in hidden form vanished from sight. The mosquitoes then flew away, leaving Tuka's body unharmed, and he was granted bodily happiness.

Returning home, the loving devotee spoke to his wife, questioning what she was saying. At evening, he quickly cleaned the place and prepared the offering for the departed ancestors. Avli then spoke to Tuka with concern, asking if he had lost his mind, for he had made all the arrangements himself and even cooked the food he now showed her.

Hearing all this from beginning to end, Tuka was filled with astonishment and wonder. Tears welled up in his eyes as he reflected on the trials of life's journey. His throat choked with emotion as he prayed to the compassionate Vitthala, saying, "Even if You do not come at this time, I shall never cease eating this sacred food."

Upon hearing Tuka's heartfelt plea, the Lord swiftly appeared, adorned in yellow robes and divine earrings shaped like makaras. Bearing conch and discus, He shone forth brilliantly. Seeing this form, Tuka fell at His feet with deep reverence. Jijabai, too, was served her plate of food, which she received with joy.

With these words of healing, Tuka worshipped the Lord of Rukmini, and the divine and devotee alike found their hearts united. Together, they ate from the same plate. Understanding the devotion behind the words, Rukmini's beloved became fulfilled and content. Then, the Lord's feet vanished from sight, leaving Jijabai amazed and rejoicing.

Behold, the wondrous Bhaktalilamrita scripture is a precious ocean of spiritual nectar, containing myriad sacred stories and glorious deeds, blooming magnificently like a great lotus. Learned and devoted listeners find delight in its loving teachings, while the Lord of the Earth, the Supreme, gently instructs His dear devotees with kind words.

Blessings upon the sacred Bhaktalilamrita! Listening alone fulfills one's deepest desires. With loving grace, the saints and devotees illumine the path. Thus concludes this thirty-first sweet chapter.

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Chapter 32

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ. With reverence to Lord Ganesha, the remover of all obstacles, I begin.

In the innocence of childhood, I was a mischievous and unruly boy, speaking foolish words heedlessly. Yet, in the eyes of my parents, these childish antics were met with fondness and indulgent affection, as they gently wiped away my stains with loving care. I would visit the homes of the affluent, savoring the offerings of sumptuous meals. But those delicacies were not served for mere enjoyment; rather, they were shared in acts of loving service and heartfelt devotion. Just as the ocean of milk is brought forth with pure offerings, without any distortion or deceit, so too were my ancient, sacred teachings preserved and displayed before the saints and sages. With humble hands, I cleared the courtyard of withered leaves and dust, carefully performing the ritual of offering fresh, fragrant flowers in worship. To cool the night's heat, I would sprinkle water with a clean hand, seeking to maintain purity and devotion in all acts of service. In the golden dawn, I adorned the sacred hill of Kanakadri with decorations bright and ornate, embellishing the sacred space with reverence and care. Such were my ancient injunctions, manifest in my humble service before the company of saints.

At the conclusion of the previous chapter, the story of Tukaram's own form—the living essence of the world's soul—was recounted. Bringing home all the sacred scriptures, he nourished his ancestors fully with heartfelt offerings.

Soon, Vaishnava devotees would come to his humble abode. It was Kantī who narrated to them the entire account, saying that through the grace of Lord Rukminikanta, the Lord of Rukmini, great fatigue was borne joyfully by Tukaram.

At dawn, he would rise and bathe in the sacred waters of the Indrayani River. With profound love, he would worship the divine deity, offering heartfelt prayers filled with devotion and praise. He would say, "O ocean of mercy, Lord Pandharinath, it is to You I have surrendered. Without discrimination, You protect all those who take refuge, saving countless souls in their darkest hours."

Boys who observed strict vows of chanting the holy name of God, born into royal families, were elevated by Your grace. You, Keshav Shet, became the beloved Sarangadhar, bringing countless blessings to Your devotees. Among all castes, the Mahar stood out with pure love, his heart drawn by an unbreakable bond to the Lord. Upon seeing such great affection, the Lord sat down and partook in food with him. The love of Saint Jnanadeva guided his own heart, and Your wondrous miracles, O Lord of Rukmini, were extolled by many saints and sages in their writings. Devotee Damaji Pant, a man of great generosity, once robbed a vast store of grains for the Lord's service. Thereafter, a Mahar named Vitthayanam quickly gathered supplies for the Lord's worship. For Mirabai, it was decreed that You took poison

on her behalf. Preserving her modesty and honor, You increased her fame throughout the world. Devotee Narasi-mehta was honored by the Lord, who granted him great status and bestowed upon him unmatched lightness and grace. Such are Your devotees, O Lord of the universe, whose praises are sung by Vaishnavas everywhere. My own intellect is weak and limited, yet my heart longs with devotion to worship Thee.

Hearing such praises, O Lord of the discus, You were pleased. You said to me, Tukaram, "Speak words of blessing; they are fitting and worthy of honor."

Through body, speech, and mind, Tukaram endured three kinds of penance: the highest merit of serving others, which sustained his spiritual power. Never did he ride a horse or a bullock cart, yet he journeyed to Pandharipur undeterred. Hearing the resounding kirtans, he found himself immersed in bliss and loving joy. Service to saints and selfless acts of charity became his true austerity. Such was the outward expression of the penance undertaken by this great Vaishnav hero.

Now, what of the penance of speech? Tukaram never uttered false or deceitful words. Day and night, he remembered the holy name, never allowing forgetfulness to touch his mind. As for mental austerity, his mind rested steadfastly at the feet of Panduranga, just as the sacred chatterbox bird, the Chatak, drinks only the purest rainwater, rejecting all else. If a child weeps, how can the mother understand without hearing his words? Such was Tukaram's firm resolve to worship Lord Pandharinath with undivided devotion. Though some devotees might doubt why Tukaram carried no musical instrument in Pandharpur, listen to this answer regarding his selfless charity and devotion. By the power of Lord Hari, all moving and unmoving beings abide and revolve. Tukaram kept his thoughts pure and protected, bowing humbly before all creatures. Just as a devoted wife cherishes her husband, keeping his thoughts close in her heart, knowing his innermost desires and sharing the love of the entire family, so did Tukaram's heart remain steadfast.

Despite the gossip and scorn of mother-in-law, father-in-law, and sister-in-law, who often spoke harsh words, Tukaram bore all their hardships with great patience, knowing the inner workings of his lord's heart. Yet, his love for the Lord was unshakable, resting on no one else but Panduranga, his sole beloved.

There was no formal method of worship that Tukaram mastered by worldly efforts; the realization of divine vision eluded many despite their attempts, as guests often came and went without understanding. Nor was Tukaram's heart caught in the snares of ritualistic worship or intellectual knowledge; he was skilled in none of these three branches, though outwardly he showed good conduct. Physical austerity was mere ritual, while vocal worship praised the virtues of the Lord. Yet to carry anything to Panduranga was not the true path, for full self-realization had not yet been attained. Knowing well these three adornments of austerity, Tukaram's heart was firmly established within them. The Lord would come to him, joining his pure merit and spiritual wealth. With this understanding, the transcendental form

of Panduranga took shape in Tukaram's mind. Reflecting deeply, he said, "I, Tukaram, shall now sing my own praises. Let the creative impulse be granted unto me."

Then, holding the hand of Namadev, Pandharinath Himself came. One night, while Tukaram lay sleeping, the Lord revealed wondrous visions, showing Himself as the soul of the universe. Placing His hand firmly on Tukaram's back, the Lord warned the great sage to be vigilant. Tukaram rose quickly and spoke, "Listen, O friends, to what I have to say. My name is the perfect devotee, and by my resolve, I have vowed that I will compose a hundred and ten million verses. This much, at least, I declare."

Then inspiration came to me, and I wrote poetry with my own hand. Counting the numbers, I tell You even this. Forty million couplets and nine crore verses, with nine million beautiful lines in the end. What remains is love itself, which I keep within my heart. Then I shall depart to Vaikuntha at my own will. Fifty-one million and five million verses—I tell this much; the rest remains unsaid. You, O Lord, hear my humble words, which I offer with love and devotion. By Your divine grace, O Lord, the world shall surely be uplifted and redeemed. Now is not the time for idle talk or vain disputes; rather, the true beginning of poetic creation must commence.

Having thus revealed these wondrous visions, the Lord's vision silently withdrew from sight. But soon the devotees awakened, proclaiming that a miraculous event had indeed taken place in its fullness. Even in dreams, the Lord's devotees would meditate deeply, holding the divine deity firmly in their hearts. The Lord of the discus, the embodiment of pure love, would then depart, taking them ever closer to Himself.

Tukaram, with his humble and contented heart, longed to learn the sacred teachings of the saints. Then the Lord of the universe commanded that he be given auspicious and gracious words from the divine court. Filled with joy and love, Tukaram wondered how this might come to pass. Like the gentle light of a lamp illuminating a dark night, so did the seed of devotion arise within the depths of his being.

In a forest thick with medicinal vines, a sacred pool of nectar shone in his vision. If one desires the eternal kingdom, it is there, steadfast and unwavering, that the soul must take its seat. A young Brahmin boy named Upamanyu asked humbly for a bowl of milk. Delighted, the goddess of wealth sat upon the ocean of milk, blessing the boy's request. With such joy, Tukaram's own spirit was enlivened, and Saraswati, the goddess of learning, settled upon his tongue. Thus began his love for poetry, borne out of sincere devotion. He took up a dry piece of paper to write on—this was no mere academic exercise, but a labor of love. With his own hand, he penned down verses according to his inner inspiration. He studied deeply the sacred Vedas and scriptures, and from Vyasa's composition, the Srimad Bhagavatam, he took the tenth canto, the immortal nectar of Lord Krishna's divine pastimes in Gokula.

Such was the childlike delight Tukaram himself experienced. In the beginning, he composed his works with simplicity. Though he had not memorized them, saints and sages recognized

his true spiritual insight. He practiced the art of singing devotional songs, not by rote memorization, but with heartfelt passion. His abhangas—the lyrical hymns—were performed by valiant Vaishnavas with great reverence. Listening to the royal poetry from Tukaram's lips, the audience was filled with wonder and delight. The singers, too, found their voices enhanced fourfold, praising his sacred speech as a boon from the heavens. As the clouds shower abundant rain, countless blades of grass spring forth in profusion. Like the immeasurable waves of the ocean, their numbers cannot be counted.

Likewise, Tukaram's devotees composed countless words of praise inspired by his divine spirit. There was no doubt among the faithful; all were moved deeply in their hearts. At the temple of Panduranga, every day, a two-hour kirtan was held. Devotees from the nearby villages would come regularly to listen, drawn by love and devotion. On Ekadashi days, the festival of Hari's awakening, the kirtan extended to four hours, its fame spreading far and wide, and the Lord's renown increasing greatly.

Among those devotees was Mambaji Baba, a Brahmin from Chinchwad, who lived there for some years. He later became a great saint and Gosavi, settling in the village of Dehu. He built a monastery there and brought his family to reside within. The institution flourished, with branches spreading, and their welfare was diligently maintained. As Tukaram's fame and spiritual stature grew, envy and ill-will also arose. Thus, among his disciples, two rivals were chosen, and it was decided how to resolve the matter.

Watching all this unfold, the world observed how diligent study and memorization were undertaken. Tukaram's reputation grew greatly, and even the Brahmins offered him respectful greetings. His speech was pure and noble; I, a humble servant, am honored to be in his presence here. His fame spread far and wide, yet no one dared question or challenge me.

Those who spoke from a place of selfish attachment would chatter with hopes and doubts, while others, like the astrologers with secret jealousies, cast shadows on his name. The planet Ketu, called the "gem of the week," twists and knots the tongue. Yet even when looking fully upon the moon, Rahu whispers to the mind with subtle malice.

Similarly, Mambaji harbored ill will toward Tukaram, vowing once, after insulting him, to exact revenge. Though such hatred burned within, Mambaji still came to sing kirtan, showing the complexity of friend and foe alike—both equally present in Tukaram's life.

Behind the temple, toward the south, Mambaji planted trees and vigilantly guarded them with his mind and body, aiming to protect the sacred grounds.

There was a woman, Tukaram's own beloved, named Amaji, whose father tended sugarcane fields. With maternal care, he guided his daughter, yet in his heart, he was like a wild buffalo.

One day, he decided to release her into Mambaji's garden. She trampled the fields and destroyed many plants. Witnessing this, Tukaram's heart was greatly disturbed. Harsh words

were exchanged, causing many kinds of conflict, until peace was finally restored. Some days later came Hari-dini Ekadashi, the auspicious day of divine vision. As the sun was setting, the pilgrimage commenced. On the path around the sacred shrine, Mambaji let loose his wrath with sharp words and harsh criticism. Tukaram, however, bore these insults patiently, understanding the timing and reasons.

Seeing these harsh actions, Tukaram's eyes burned like a blazing fire. Though resentment had long dwelt within Mambaji's heart, this was its fiery culmination. Like a great serpent struck on its tail, he hissed and fled, desperate to preserve his life. Yet even in his anger, the Brahmin uttered many offensive words toward Tukaram. Swiftly Tukaram approached and gently removed the thorns from Mambaji's heart. Though struck by cruel words, Tukaram did not retaliate but held peace and forgiveness deep within. He remained silent, speaking no reply. The thorns were removed quickly; Mambaji, caught in the snare, fell silent. Taking up another burden in his hands, his heart was still untouched by mercy.

He struck again and again, breaking twenty or thirty thorns. Yet from that moment onward, no Vaishnav warrior faltered; all joyfully continued their chanting with love. Though Tukaram's forgiveness was renowned, no other could be found on earth like him. A second story could not be composed, for the poet's heart was heavy with frustration.

Those lacking compassion for living beings are hardhearted and indifferent to flesh and blood. They may bear the outward form of a Brahmin, yet are truly nameless in spirit. Like a cruel farmer uproots a vine, so was the Vaishnav devotee beaten. His hands ached from the blows, yet Tukaram remained composed. When the scoundrel went to the monastery, Tukaram approached the temple. His relatives warned him of the danger, urging him to seek divine protection.

But the insults and curses were unending—these were the deeds of Lakshmipati himself. Tukaram resolved never to keep company with evildoers, for such company unsettled the mind. Thus, Tukaram himself spoke the abhangas from his own mouth, describing how all the thorns were broken. The people who witnessed this were filled with awe.

"Those of tender hearts, feeling deeply moved, shed tears upon seeing Tukaram's hardships. They spoke lovingly of the devotee's steadfast love. Then the dancer took up the anklets, removing the thorns in time. Kalyani then began her song and brought shame to the worldly realm. But the merciful gaze of Lord Pandharinath soon fell upon Tukaram. All his wounds were healed, and his body found rest."

On Ekadashi of Hari's awakening, a great pilgrimage was held. Devotees gathered in full, and the Vaishnav warriors spoke with joy. Mambaji Baba, the great saint, came continuously to the kirtans. When delayed even briefly, he was summoned to sing. Hearing this, Tukaram said, "My body aches greatly." The devotees swiftly came to his side. Falling at his feet, they rubbed his body, saying, "Why do you bear these thorns, O weakened Lord? I have not

troubled the trees," Tukaram replied. "Why then is your heart disturbed? Please forgive this offense, for now we shall proceed to the kirtan."

So saying, the devotees massaged his body for four hours. Mambaji's shame was deep, and soon he joined the kirtan. Like a stormy sea in monsoon, the raging waters flood the entire village, yet the fire of passion never dies; all who love agree.

So Tukaram, the ocean of peace, bore Mambaji's fiery anger. Outwardly calm and cool, yet inwardly consumed by hatred. Though many miracles were shown to the saints, the heart of the Brahmin was not pure. Listen closely, O wise listener, to this tale in its fullness.

The Pandavas' fortress must be taken, for the divine stories have been told many times. Yet Duryodhana's deceitful heart was not changed by these tales. Thus, he sat in the assembly, hearing all, yet fault filled his mind. Tukaram's pure meditation and merits stood firm.

A serpent does not consume its own food, yet what befell on Ekadashi? Though the heart was not pure, the devotee's effort bore fruit. A stone does not speak, yet what of the yogi's silent wisdom? The fire glows brightly in the ashes; yet the mind feels no remorse. Though hidden away in a mouse's hole, one is forever restless within, so too the kirtankar, seated quietly though his heart is deeply moved. Tukaram's mind remained steadfast and even; friend and foe alike were equal to him. He held no bitterness or grudges in his heart but sang his devotional songs with boundless love.

His mind was firmly attached to the divine Name and Form, transcending the body itself. The listeners of his kirtans, the saints and devotees, were filled with overflowing love. They sang the praises of Krishna, Vishnu, Hari, Govinda—names resounding with bliss. The Imperishable, the Eternal, the Supreme Being, Sat-Chit-Ananda, released them swiftly from the bonds of worldly existence.

Panduranga, the protector of the helpless; Madanatata, the resplendent consort of Rukmini, is ever untouched by actions born of illusion. Such is the divine Sri Ranga's grace. The wheel of time revolves incessantly; souls wander through the course of their own deeds. From here, liberation comes swiftly through the grace of Rukmini's Lord, Shri Vitthala.

Moved by deep compassion, the devotees danced and sang with great love. The melodious sound of cymbals and clapping filled the air, while the celestial music seemed to weave into the very sky. The snapping of the cymbals was so lively that no one felt weariness or sleepiness. Both singers and listeners were fully absorbed in the endless devotion. The lives of saints, so rich in spiritual nectar, were precisely the subjects studied and understood by these devotees. Devotees who listened were captivated and their hearts pierced deeply.

Thus, Tukaram sang his kirtans while his beloved slept in the temple's inner sanctum. Then came the thieves — hear now what happened next.

At home was a pair of cows. Leaving them behind, the thieves fled. Soon a signal was given; a cry rose from behind. Westward from the village lay a patch of land known as Bodkya's

field, about a quarter of a kos away. When the thieves reached there, the news of the incident reached the divine ears. Tukaram was so absorbed in singing that he remained unaware of the thieves entering while his beloved lay sleeping. The cows were stolen, and they must be recovered.

“We will not go there,” said the devotees, “for Tukaram is deeply troubled.” Such were their words of caution and concern. Then the mighty Lord appeared in a terrifying form, taking up a mighty club to chastise the thieves. The thieves fled quickly, but the great warrior stood firm on the path. Holding a heavy mace, he was ready to strike. They spoke among themselves, wondering who this formidable figure on the road might be. “Such a powerful marvel surely cannot be ordinary—how should we approach this?”

The herdsman was holding a stick in his hand, but this was not his own doing. It was the strange fate of karma — what truly is stored in the treasury of deeds? Thus spoke the thieves, and they hurried off down another path. Yet the warrior followed, club raised, and Sarangadhara stood firm. Terror gripped their hearts; they wondered what course to take. Looking around in all eight directions, they saw Lord Vitthala appearing on every side.

They said, “This black-clad one is a fierce warrior who blocks our way. Is he a demon or a demon’s demon? We must save our lives!”

Dawn came and the sun rose, yet their arrogance remained undiminished. What solution could there be for these troubled minds? They deliberated among themselves and agreed: Tukaram is a devotee of Vitthala. They would return the stolen cows. For this, their accomplices appeared. They said, “This act has angered the Lord; we have indeed committed an offense. Now we must bind the cows securely to prevent further harm.”

So, setting off toward the village, the thieves moved cautiously. Behind, Rukmini’s consort followed, ready to take his revenge. Fear seized their hearts. “What if they strike us from behind unexpectedly?” Thus, panic set in, and they entered the village trembling. Then they came to Tukaram’s home, where the cows were securely tied by his own hands. Quickly, they fled. The warrior remained seated by the village gate, blocking the path. Wherever the thieves tried to go, he was there, thwarting their escape.

“Devotee of Vishnu, free of malice, friend and foe are alike to you. Now is the time for our deliverance; show us the way!” they pleaded. The thieves’ words were plain and simple, easily understood by all who heard. Their hearts were amazed by Tukaram’s tale — so wondrous was the story.

Tukaram was astonished in spirit, and with closed eyes, he recalled the form of Panduranga. “In the kirtan,” said the thieves, “there is no place for Rukmini’s consort. We speak only the truth.”

At that moment, Tukaram opened his eyes, and the form of Panduranga appeared, radiant and divine. “O Lord of Pandharpur, O God above gods, when will You come here again? We perform the Hari awakening ceremonies, while You wander through forests and wild lands. Teach us how to care for the cows,” they said. Since the beginning, this duty has been ours. With hearts sincere, we recount these virtues, praying that your mind be free from sorrow. Adopting the guise of the madman, you appear like a thief who roams the land, stealing glances from the world.

Now the dawn breaks, and it is time for the morning worship. Yet, O ocean of mercy, resting on the thousand-headed serpent, such neglect is not fitting for You. Despite our distaste, we spoke lovingly, but you fled at once, rising quickly with a great staff in hand, chasing away the thieves from your back.

Had you not been the dear friend of the loving, the joyous dance of kirtan would not have been complete. Hearing your swift pursuit, O Tukaram, the Lord of Lords arrived. You danced in the kirtans, and behind you came Pandharinath himself, holding firmly a club, witnessed by the entire gathering.

To the thieves, you appeared formidable and fierce, but to others, you seemed ordinary. To the thieves you said, “Rise now, walk your own paths in order. You may beat us with your cattle prods, yet quickly release us; this is the gift you give to us.”

So saying, the thieves fled hastily, and the great tale spread afar, echoing the sacred name of the Lord. Mambaji, hearing this wondrous story with his ears, was struck with awe in his heart, saying that the devotees’ reputation would surely grow, for such deeds were rare indeed. Thus, with such thoughts in mind, some may quietly scowl in their place, failing to grasp the glory of the devotee of Vishnu, their minds blinded by hatred.

Yet, this is the tale of the humble devotee, which repeatedly appears as a vision before us. The goddess of speech labors in vain; weary listeners do not heed.

Devotees arise upon the earth, and thereby the fame of devotees increases. Even if false coins were never minted, who else would speak the truth? Even if Yama’s realm were never created, who would hold hope for heaven? Even if there were no thieves roaming about, who would have faith in liberation? Even though the body surely dies, who then would desire immortality? It is indeed by the grace of the humble devotee that devotion becomes renowned. If great darkness did not cover the night, how would a lamp’s flame flicker so? By the power of Ravana’s misdeeds, Lord Rama attained great renown.

Let such speeches be many, yet if the thieves had not fled, how would the special stories of saints be shown to the world? Then the Vaishnav Tukaram, on such occasion, sings the tales in many ways, saying, “How did Lord Shri Hari find a devotee? Hear now this story.”

The fame of Vishnu’s deeds is well known; thus, the tale of Hiranyakashipu’s boastfulness is told. Hear the flight of Prahlada and the sudden manifestation of the Lord on the pillar. By

harming his own devotee, the enemy's fame only grew. When Duryodhana insulted Draupadi, the tale of her honor only increased. Unable to bear the fate of his devotee, Lord Krishna hurried with infinite garments, causing all wicked men to blush with shame.

The protection of the pure saints and the establishment of righteous dharma were maintained by Him. Thus, without regard to time or place, the Lord appeared in dark form. I perceive thus, O wondrous age of Kali, many hardships for devotees. Yet, the Lord Rukminipati bears them all. The faithful servant, dear as a gardener, tries to hide a place, but hunger quickly tears it open. He who created all creatures with the smallest pore, takes refuge in the belly of His devotee. The gardener speaks with loving affection. That name came out lamenting, swallowed by Rukminikanta, who appeared clad in yellow robes and then drew His own hand forth. From the belly emerged a dark form, yet He remained the child of the gardener's womb. Thus Tukaram sang at that time, narrating loving stories.

He tells the listeners, "The entire world is fleeting and transient. Whoever delights in serving Shri Hari will be marked by the age of Kali."

Such teachings were given in kirtans, and on the rising day of the tenth lunar day, with clapping and shouting, they praised Vitthala with fervor. Then, brightening the auspicious evening worship, they performed the ritual ablutions of Lord Rukminipati. The following chapter's sweet origin will also be presented to the attentive listeners.

Oh, the sacred Bhaktalilamrita text, speaking of Lord Rukmini's consort, serves as the sovereign's support; only the wise know this truth fully. Blessings on the Bhaktalilamrita text! Hearing it fulfills one's heart's desire. The loving devotees rejoice in this rich thirty-second chapter.

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Chapter 33

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (In reverent salutation to Lord Gaṇeśa)

All glory to Thee, O ocean of mercy, foremost among all in the worlds. Thou beholdest Thy devotee with a glance of grace, and by that glance Thou cuttest asunder the noose of worldly bondage, tearing away the meshes of saṁsāra. When Thou grantest the vision of Thy form with attributes, the devotee's heart is enraptured with love. Therefore, out of compassion, Thou even keepest him apart from harsh and evil company, lest his devotion be tarnished.

If Thou bestowest upon a devotee a virtuous son, the father's heart may yet become entangled in worldly affection; hence, out of Thy supreme guardianship, Thou sometimes removest the cause of such attachment from both father and child, lest their hearts drift from Thee. If Thou grantest abundant wealth and grain, they may be used for worldly indulgence, and the remembrance of Thy holy feet may fade; therefore, Thou providest only so much food and clothing as will sustain life in contentment, keeping the heart steady in devotion.

Such, O Lord of Paṇḍharī, is Thy wondrous working, deeply imprinted in my heart. On whomsoever Thou bestowest Thy glance of compassion, to him Thou removest the delusion of māyā. Upon the wicked Thou castest an irresistible delusion and causest them to trouble Thy devotees, only that Thou mayest, in due time, manifest Thy own divine play in manifold ways, O consort of Śrī Rukmiṇī.

In the thousand names of Viṣṇu, the sage Dvaipāyana himself has enshrined Thy name, declaring Thee to be the destroyer of the fears of the fearful. This truth I have myself beheld. Verily, Thou art the sole wielder of all power, moving the cords of ancient destiny; making me but an instrument, Thou causest this dull and inert tongue to speak Thy praise.

In the preceding chapter was told the charming account of how thieves once stole a cow; but Thou, O Hṛṣīkeśa, didst rescue it and display the marvel before all. On the day of Haridīn (Ekadashi), when the great vow was observed and four watches of the night passed in wakeful devotion, the next morning I, Tukā, bathed at the banks of the Indrayāṇī, and with deepest love worshipped Thee, O Pāṇḍuraṅga.

Then came word from the village headman that in the night, thieves had taken away my cow. But Thou didst give clear proof of Thy power by bringing her back, leading her home before all eyes. The people were amazed at the miracle and, rejoicing, invited me to partake of their meal. Rice and bread had been prepared, with a third dish of vegetables, and a bowl of milk was brought forth.

Then, marvelling, Viṣṇudās beheld me say to the host, "Purify thy heart; if thou wilt give me a copper vessel full of milk, I shall at once offer it to the Lord." The host rose, filled a brass vessel with milk, and I, the loving servant, carried it to the temple and offered it to the Deity. Though to the eyes of men the deity is but of stone, yet to me it is the ever-living Lord; daily

I gave Him milk to drink, for He who is beyond the control of even Brahmā becomes the obedient Master to His devotee.

In this way many days passed, but the host's mind began to be troubled. He thought, "Every day a copperful of milk is taken away; how shall I keep buttermilk for my children? How will the household fare?" He called his young daughter Bhāgīrathī and, coaxing her with love, asked her privately to tell him the truth: "When you take the milk to the temple, is it really drunk by the Black One? Tell me plainly." The child replied, "Indeed, the Lord drinks it, and what remains my elders take, giving me a little too."

Hearing the innocent words, the man was filled with wonder. One day he said to me, "Let me offer the milk myself." I, the loving servant, readily agreed, and so he went to the temple. But the Lord of Paṇḍharī was now in a dilemma. "If I drink the milk, there is no love in his heart—only testing curiosity. If I perform no marvel, Tukā will be reproached in his home."

Thus communing with Śrī Rukmiṇī, the Lord refrained from His usual play. Fear of offending the devotee made Him reluctant to act contrary to love. "To drink, or not to drink?" pondered the Lord who is normally beyond all qualities. Even He who dwells in the ocean of milk found Himself, as it were, caught in the milk of a devotee's offering—a strange marvel indeed!

The man brought the copper vessel full of milk, but without reverence of heart. The milk was hot and needed to cool, but he, ignorant of such service, placed the scalding vessel directly to the Lord's lips. The world's Master was burnt thereby, and in surprise the man beheld His countenance turn aside, a blister appearing upon the divine lips.

The man marvelled, saying, "To my eyes He is black stone, yet truly there is life within, for daily the Master drinks the milk. This is no false deed!" Gazing more intently, he saw the blister clearly and was filled with astonishment.

Returning home, Jījābāī told me what had passed, saying, "You sent the milk with him out of laziness, and he placed a hot vessel to the Lord's mouth without thought. Because you have forsaken worldly ways, he bears you enmity and calls you a deceiver, but even a particle of māyā does not cling to you."

As Hṛṣīkeśa thus spoke, Tukā was filled with deep distress. Turning to his wife, he said with pain, "How could you give hot milk to the Lord?"

Avlī replied in answer, "You sing daily in the temple of that very Śrī Kṛṣṇa who, in Gokula, swallowed the twelve fires. And yet, when my milk was only a little warm, He turned His head aside, and instantly a blister rose upon His lip—go and see in the temple."

Hearing her words, Tukā's heart was stirred. If the past miracles were true, how could the Lord be burnt by milk? Thus musing, he hastened to the temple. There he saw that indeed Paṇḍharīnātha had turned His head, and on His lip was a blister. Tukā's heart overflowed with love, and his eyes with tears, as a mother's would on seeing her child scalded.

Choked with emotion, the loving Tukā cried, “Thou art burnt, O Paṇḍharīnātha! O my friend of the friendless, O preceptor of the world!” Even as he sang hymns and praises, the blister disappeared; yet the slight bend of the Lord’s head remained, and may still be seen by all to this day—a mark kept by Śrī Rukmiṇī’s Lord as witness to His devotee’s glory.

Once, while journeying through the fields of Chākaṇ, Tukā was suddenly attacked by swarms of gnats, which bit him severely. Seeing this, a certain Vaiṣṇava devotee was not grieved at all, saying, “One who works for the good of others must bear the blows of the world,” and he sat quietly. Tukā thought, “One may guard one’s body, but why should one’s mind be pained for the hurt of such small creatures? This perishable body will pass away; I know it well—let there be no repentance.”

Though the gnats bit him in countless ways, causing much bodily pain, he felt no inward sorrow, but continued his worship with love. Then, in the guise of a traveller, Śrī Rukmiṇīpati quickly approached, taking in His hand a fan of palm fibre to drive away the gnats. Others too passed that way and saw Tukā, but out of fear for themselves none came near to help.

As only a mother can hasten to a crying child, so did the compassionate Vithṭhal come swiftly to his Tukā. Brushing away the gnats with His own hand, Śrī Hari caressed him tenderly, bringing bodily relief. Then Tukā continued his journey and by sunset reached the holy place of Dehu. Going quickly to the temple, he beheld Śrī Rukmiṇī’s Lord.

Like a staff that has fallen to the ground, his body bowed in full prostration, and he rose with a heart full of love. As night came, he began kīrtana, singing, “Hail, O purifier of the fallen, Śrī Hari! Bear me across the ocean of worldly existence. Let there be no food to eat, no increase of children—yet let Thy grace be upon me. Let the body be tormented in many ways, let worldly troubles come—yet in my heart I desire nothing but Thy favour, O Śrīpati. As my speech flows from my own lips, so do I daily teach; if any inquire of me, I will set them in Thy path.”

Thus, the Vaiṣṇava saint worshipped with loving devotion, chanting the names of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa and making the people hear. Three watches of the night passed, and the maṅgala-ārati was lit. After waving the lights before Śrī Rukmiṇīpati, he bowed with love, and the assembled devotees returned home. Tukā sat upon his seat, fixing his mind on the Lord’s name and form, and continued his loving worship.

So the days passed, until a new and touching tale arose. Tukā had two sons: the elder named Mahādeva, the younger named Viṭhobā. The elder was seized with grievous illness—stone in the bladder—and suffered greatly. Avlī tried many remedies. Whatever medicines were recommended, she procured and administered with all care, following strict diet rules. Day and night she pined for her son’s relief, yet there was no improvement.

She even fetched consecrated ashes from the family deity’s shrine and applied them with faith. She sought out those who claimed the power to remove afflictions by charms, and went daily to their houses. These persons declared it to be a case of spirit-possession, and

she believed them. They placed amulets and threads upon the boy's neck, performed various rites, and poured out her mother's heart in anxious effort.

Yet all was in vain. Day by day the boy's pain grew worse. He would take no food, and Avlī's mind became utterly troubled, unable to think what next to do. Her husband, she felt, was "Mad after God," giving no thought to the household. She saw no hope for the boy's recovery, and sighed heavily. When he urinated, the whole body would twitch in agony, and Tukā, seeing this, would quietly withdraw to solitude.

Avlī, restless in mind, lamented to her neighbours that the child was tormented and nothing availed. "I have tried every temple, every remedy," she said, "but day and night pass without relief, and my very life is wasting away." Out of love for her son's recovery, she tried pounding and giving medicines in many ways, but his suffering increased more and more.

Her husband's mind, she knew, was already alienated from worldly ties; now her neighbours added fuel to her trouble. Some, seeing the boy's condition, spoke ill-omened words: "Why do you weary yourself with medicines? Your husband's heart is fixed on Rukmiṇī's Lord; therefore many obstacles arise in your worldly life. When one's heart is set on Paṇḍharīnātha, even the beloved child's time of death will not be delayed."

Hearing such talk, anger flared in Avlī's heart. Like giving liquor to a monkey or provoking a scorpion to sting, such was her vexation. This mood, concealed from others, was the same as that of Duryodhana when guided by the evil counsel of Śakuni; like Hiraṇyākṣa and Hiraṇyakaśipu aiding one another in opposing the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha; like the demon Rāvaṇa, egged on by Kuṁbhakarṇa, whose mind was overthrown so that he committed the sin of abducting Sītā.

Just as the demoness Śūrpaṇakhā once roamed the forest harboring hatred for Śrī Rāma in her heart, and there met her kinswoman who filled her ears with evil counsel, so too did Jijābāī now nurture within herself words of enmity toward the Lord. The neighboring women, joining her mood, would urge her, "Do not keep Vithobā in your heart. Once a man turns wholly to His worship, the household is doomed. Has not your child been struck by a strange and wondrous affliction? Surely this is no accident."

Having spoken thus, the neighbors returned to their homes. But Avlī's heart burned with restless anxiety as she gazed upon her suffering son. By evening, the boy's urine was entirely blocked; his belly swelled like a drum; his limbs grew stiff and motionless. When the mother questioned him, no answer came; his hands and feet had turned cold. "This boy is certainly dying," she thought. "It will not fail to happen in this hour. Now I must go straight to the temple, confront that dark idol, and strike it down! He who has drawn my husband's mind away from worldly life has, in truth, slain my son—let me strike Him in return."

Thus resolving, she seized Mahādeva and dragged him along in furious haste toward the temple. In one hand she clutched a heavy pestle, swearing to take her revenge upon the deity. When she came to the temple door, the Lord who reclines upon Śeṣa was inwardly

astonished. “What is to be done now?” thought Rukmiṇī’s Lord. “If Avlī strikes Me here, the people will speak ill of Me.”

Even as He pondered, the Primordial Mother, the shadow of the Supreme dwelling within Him, spoke gently: “O King of Paṇḍharpur, why this needless worry? At Your mere will the infinite worlds are created and destroyed. Do You fear for such a trifle? When famine falls, the earth produces no food—should the ocean then be anxious? When the sun beats fiercely, the people desire a cooling breeze—why should the moon be troubled? If You but glance with mercy upon anyone, even common stones will turn to gold. And is it not in Your power to restore the dead to life? Such is the strength of Your servant.”

Meanwhile, Avlī burst into the temple, dragging her son. “I shall dash him against the idol,” she cried, “and then strike with my pestle!” But as she came before the Lord, a voice rang out from behind the deity: “Your son is now healed—take him home.” Startled, Avlī wondered, “How can this stone deity speak?” She looked down, and lo—the boy had passed water freely. So great was the flow that mud began to gather in the temple, and she hurried outside with him. The child’s bladder, once obstructed, was now entirely cleared; all the corrupted matter that had poisoned his body was expelled.

Looking to his mother, the boy said, “I am hungry.” Avlī, amazed, murmured within herself, “It was fear of me that moved Rukmiṇī’s Lord to heal my son.” And, without further word, she returned quietly into the temple. Seating the boy at home, she served him food. When Tukā returned and heard the tale, he said with gentle reverence, “Paṇḍharīnātha has shown His grace.”

The child who had been at death’s door was restored in a moment. None can fathom the Lord’s play—only He knows its secret. After the meal, the Vaiṣṇava saint went swiftly to the temple, and as four hours of the night passed, he began the kīrtana. In that holy assembly, Tukārām spoke of the great devotees of the past, telling their sacred names and deeds so that the listeners’ love for the Lord might grow ever deeper.

In those days, there was one noble and simple-hearted brāhmaṇa named Gaṅgādhar Mavāḷ, a man of upright conduct dwelling in the village of Kaḍus. He was ever devoted to Tukārām, serving him as his constant scribe, faithfully penning down the saint’s utterances with a gracious and reverent spirit. Another was Santāji Teli, whose family name was Jagaṇāḍe; he had spent many years in the town of Chākaṇ, and in the end, came to surrender himself completely at the feet of Tukārām.

These two, bound together by the same pure intent, became steadfast Vaiṣṇava devotees, renouncing all attachment to worldly life and pouring their hearts into the composition of sacred verses. Daily they joined in the kīrtan of the Lord, standing behind Tukārām and upholding the dhruvapada, the recurring refrain of the holy songs. Their accompaniment drew forth an extraordinary beauty in the music, and with love they danced in harmony with the saint.

Having abandoned all vain desires, they clung firmly to the company of the holy. In the assemblies of kīrtan, they would hold the refrain with devotion, moving in rhythm and joy. Even as a charioteer knows the mind of the traveller and steers the car accordingly, or as a devoted wife adjusts herself to her husband's tastes in all matters, or as a servant who offers betel to his master and wears out his body in service without ever seeking recognition, so too did these two—Gaṅgādhar the brāhmaṇa and Santāji the oil-merchant—follow Tukārām with life and soul.

With tāl and vīṇā in hand, they entered the kīrtan, holding the refrain with steady voices, sending forth melodious tones from behind, and moving with love. Thus passed the night, and when four watches had gone, the Vaiṣṇava devotees began the kīrtan anew. With tender pathos they invoked the Lord of Paṇḍharī in song, pouring out the love of their hearts.

Drawing Him into his meditation, Tukārām would speak to Rukmiṇī's Lord: "Wilt Thou embrace me or not? This alone fills my mind day and night. Wilt Thou grant me the vision of Thy feet, or wilt Thou not? This longing burns within my soul. Wilt Thou speak to me, or wilt Thou remain silent? My body trembles with this yearning. Wilt Thou remember me or not, O Garuḍadhvaja? This is my doubt, for apart from Thee, O Keśava-rāja, there is no other helper.

"I am indeed lowly, unworthy in my deeds, and therefore my soul grows weary. Thou art the Friend of the forlorn, the Ocean of Mercy—let this be proved true in my case now. If Thou wouldst feel shame on my account, I have no greatness even in name. In all ways I am a thief in Thy service, and this, O Inner Witness, Thou knowest well. I have neither the purity of lineage and works, nor any secret merit stored away. I know not the ways of bhakti or of pure love—but Thou, O Puruṣottama, knowest all. I have not the strength of austerity, charity, or righteousness; I bear none of these virtues. I am only a burden upon the earth—this too Thou knowest, O Compassionate One."

Thus praying in deep tenderness and love, Tukārām, though still in the body, entered a state beyond the body, and in his very heart the form of Lord Paṇḍuraṅga arose, made manifest through the power of loving devotion. In the kīrtan, he danced in rapture, bowing full-length to the ground again and again. The Lord Viṭhobā, for His part, set aside His own divinity and took delight in playing the role of the saint's companion.

Seeing this, Sāraṅgadhara's mind grew anxious. He thought within himself: "If Tukārām has attained such complete unity with the Lord, to whom then shall he address his words?"

When the moment of need arises, whom else shall I call upon but You? And if I am to run to someone's aid, whose name should I take but Yours? This body, which has assumed the very form of Brahman, has been sanctified through the ceaseless chanting of the Divine Name. Thus spoke the saint, and behold—he embraced Tukaram, holding him close to his heart. Then, as bodily consciousness gently receded, he poured forth unending compassion.

“O Lord of Pandhari, Friend of the helpless,” he prayed, “You alone are my mother and father, my sister and brother, my dearest kin and companion. O Infinite One, apart from You there is none! O Vithoba, You are my great and true Guru. Ferry me, in my very body, across this ocean of existence. Grant me this boon—that I may ceaselessly sing Your Name.”

Thus, completing the kirtan in such manner, they proceeded to the auspicious rite of the maṅgalarati. Bowing and waving lights before the Lord of Rukmini, they offered prostrations full of love.

Then Sarangdhar spoke, “Tuka is the very incarnation of the Name. His love for the manifest Lord is pure and great—therefore have I taken form before him. Yet he does not incline toward the non-dual philosophy, and thus seeks the shelter of the Sadguru. But ahead, there may come obstacles to his devotion toward the Guru. For as the conduct of a great one shapes the ways of others, it would be fitting for me, keeping the guise of a Brahmin, to bestow grace upon him.”

At this, Rukmini addressed the Lord of Pandhari: “I place a humble request before You. Whomever You bestow grace upon attains the immortal state. Concerning this, let me speak of an ancient tale. When, by the curse of Brahma, the entire Yadu race perished, it was Uddhava alone whom You saved. For though You bestowed grace upon him, the power of Brahma’s curse could not be overcome. Yet in that moment, You spoke to him the entire Bhāgavata.”

“In the incarnation of Rāma, there was the devotee Vibhishana, and also Hanuman, the son of Anjani. Upon whomever You placed Your hand, his body became imperishable. And so, if You were now to place Your hand upon Tukaram’s head, his body too would become immortal.”

Hearing these words of Rukmini, Sarangdhar smiled. “Indeed,” he said, “You speak the truth. Tuka is dear to us as our very life. The touch of Time shall not harm him. I shall bestow upon him that very mantra which ensures this.”

Having spoken thus, the ocean of compassion sought an auspicious hour. He chose the blessed day—Thursday, the tenth of the bright fortnight in the month of Māgha, a day complete in every mark of fortune.

That night, as Tukaram slept, he beheld in a dream the form of Panduranga, and in due time narrated this vision to the saints. The next morning, after bathing in the holy Indrayani, the Vaishnava devotees made their way to the temple, tulasi leaves in their hands. Along the way, they encountered a Brahmin. It was ever Tukaram’s habit that upon seeing a Brahmin or a saint, he would bow with full prostration, offering tulasi leaves with heartfelt love.

Just as things are clearly seen in waking life, so too did the dream appear to his inner sight. Such is the play of the Lord’s own Māyā, known to all Vaishnavas. Thus, upon meeting the Brahmin that day, Tukaram offered the tulasi leaves and prostrated himself before him. The

venerable Brahmin, pleased with his devotion, placed his hand upon Tukaram's head and gave him the mantra of Rāma and Krishna's Name, the very mantra by which the world is redeemed.

At that moment, the Lord Himself spoke, following the unbroken Guru-lineage, revealing His words with supreme sweetness: "I am Raghava Chaitanya, a devotee of the Lord and a Vaishnava. Chaitanya Keshava is my Guru, and Baba Chaitanya is the name by which I am known. Do not ever forsake the worship of the feet of Shri Panduranga."

Hearing this, Tukaram, his heart overflowing with joy, prayed, "Master, come swiftly to my home and sanctify my dwelling. Cook with Your own hands, and partake of the meal until You are fully satisfied."

Hearing these words, the Lord of Rukmini replied, "Even if you offer me but a quarter-measure of ghee with love, I shall indeed come to your house."

When Tukaram heard this, he joyfully told his wife: "O beloved, the Lord Himself has come to our house. Gather all the offerings, and give the ghee that He requests."

But upon hearing this, Kanhopatra became angry. "From where has this wretched Brahmin appeared," she said, "that I should give him a quarter-measure of ghee? From where shall I obtain it? What caste is this Brahmin whom you have brought into our home again and again? You have broken our vessels and reduced us to clay pots—how shall we manage this household now?"

As the quarrel swelled into a great and grievous commotion, the revered Sadguru departed swiftly from that place. Such was the true vision that the valiant Vaiṣṇava beheld in his dream that very day. Awakening from sleep, Tukaram felt deep remorse within his heart, and said within himself, "Had I met my Sadguru, my dearest friend, I should have surely crossed this ocean of worldly existence."

In that dream-vision, the Sadguru had been asked for half a seer of ghee for a meal, and had in truth requested it with his own lips. Yet, because discord in the household had grown fierce, the Lord departed in haste. Then, in that same vision, he revealed his names—Keshava Chaitanya, Raghava Chaitanya, and Babaji—declaring them openly, and imparted to me, for my sake, the sacred Rāma-Kṛṣṇa-Hari mantra.

It was on the bright tenth day of the month of Māgha, on a most auspicious Thursday, that, having wholly accepted me as his own, the Sadguru swiftly departed. In loving affection Tukaram composed three abhaṅgas recounting this divine incident in his own words. Whoever sings them with true devotion shall never again be afflicted by the toils of worldly bondage.

Thus, by the grace of the Sadguru, this certainty was given to Tukaram in his dream. Devout and tender-hearted souls, in their own deep experience, know this truth, and listen with rapt attention to this account when the Lord's praises are sung. In later times, this tradition

continued unbroken—that to those who loved Tukaram with utmost devotion, the Lord would, even in dreams, bestow His favour. This marvel endures even to this day.

In the next chapter, wondrous and sweet in its essence, the beloved of Rukmiṇī will Himself speak. Listen to it with reverence, O loving devotees, keeping your minds steadfast. For the fame of His servant is to be made manifest among the people, therefore does Paṇḍharināth a narrate this Bhakta Līlāmṛta. The Lord, who has assumed form for the sake of His līlās, the beloved of Rukmiṇī, holds the guiding thread of this narration in His own hands, and has merely chosen me as an instrument—this indeed is His intent.

With both hands resting upon His hips, standing upon the brick, the wielder of the discus, the sustainer of the worlds, bestows His boon, delighting in the singing of noble virtues. Blessed indeed is this Śrī Bhakta Līlāmṛta; its very hearing fulfils all desires. Let affectionate devotees, who listen with pure hearts, rejoice in this thirty-third chapter, rich in sweetness, containing one hundred and eighty-three verses.

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Chapter 34

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (In the blessed name of Śrī Gaṇeśa)

I am an orphan in this world, bereft of support, helpless in every way, and crippled in all respects. Yet, O Śrī Hari, I dare to call myself Yours, and in the depths of my heart I cherish the pride of belonging to You. Deprived of devotion, lacking in wisdom, bereft of strength, and ignorant of renunciation—I am but a dull and foolish soul. Without You, O Lord, what could cure this helplessness? As impure water from a filthy drain, if it flows into a well, pollutes it completely so that none would draw from it, so too is the state of a fallen being without Your touch. But if that same impure water meets the sacred Gaṅgā, it becomes pure in that very instant, and sages and perfected beings will gladly use it. Likewise, even the most degraded sinner, if he comes to You with sincere surrender—though his past be steeped in wrong—You, O Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, overlook all faults and grant him refuge without question.

Even those condemned by the scriptures to the lowest births, if they but take Your holy name with pure intent, are raised to a station worthy of reverence. Such is the sanctifying power of repeating the name of Śrīpati. O true purifier of the fallen, O universal teacher of all the worlds—knowing this in the core of my being, I, poor as I am, take shelter at Your feet, O beloved consort of Rukmiṇī. Now, according to Your divine will, deal with me as You please—whether to uplift or to humble me. The titles by which the world proclaims Your glory are in no way false. O Śrīpati, countless devotees have You delivered, as the Purāṇas declare. Among them I am one dull-witted soul—yet I, too, am Yours, O sovereign of the earth.

In a previous chapter, the story was such that, in a dream, You bestowed grace upon Tukā. When he awoke, he pondered this wondrous experience in amazement.

One day, a tender-hearted devotee, Tukā, went into the forest and sat there. He lamented that harsh company had brought him dishonor among men. He thought within himself, “Should I preserve the duties of a householder, or rather serve visiting ascetics with full hospitality?” Yet his wife disliked such service, and in the name of religious duty she opposed it. Even in dreams, such sweet counsel would not reach me from her lips. Well then, God has freed my mind from its binding cords; it shall not be entangled anywhere. So, thinking thus, the Vaiṣṇava devotee engaged himself in loving bhajan, and as four hours of the night passed, he went to the temple for kīrtan. With various strains of compassion he raised songs of praise, and many listeners gathered—loving, yet tinged with a gentle sadness in their hearts.

Having performed kīrtan through all four watches of the night, he then bathed in the Indrayāṇī, worshipped Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga, and returned to the forest to sit in solitude. If someone brought him a morsel of bread, he would partake of it sparingly. But he would not go home, avoiding the company of those he called harsh. Thus two full months passed

without Tukā returning to his house. His wife, meanwhile, complained to the neighbor women, saying: “My husband stays in the village but never comes home. Who has set him on this path? I must go and ask.”

She knew he sat in the forest singing bhajan, sometimes eating food brought by others, and at night dancing in the temple to the beat of cymbals.

One day, as the devotee went from his bath toward the temple, a woman fetched water from the river. There, upon the path, they suddenly met. She caught hold of the hem of Tukā’s garment, and standing before him, bit her lip and said with restrained anger: “O Avsarā! For two months you have not come home. Tell me, who am I to you, and how am I to manage this household alone?”

At this he answered: “Why should you speak thus? Are not Vithobā and Rakhumāī our father and mother? If you keep their holy feet in mind, no calamity will touch you in worldly life.”

But she replied, “No, Avsarā, you must now come home with me.” He said, “If you insist on that, then first give me some food to eat.”

Thus, by her promise, she brought Tukā home. At the doorway stood a sacred tulasī plant, and there he sat down.

It so happened that day was Hari’s day (Ekadashi), and people came to hear kīrtan. When the wife saw them, she frowned, turned her face, and muttered under her breath. Tukā said to her, “Who comes to whose house? You dislike them inwardly—why then grind your teeth and mutter?”

He continued, “When people come for God’s sake, the whole universe becomes our kin. Why speak harshly to them and drive them away as though guarding your scarf?”

She replied, “I leave my own work and see strangers entering my house, and you expect me to honor them? Instead, I feel like running them out.”

Hearing this, the Vaiṣṇava devotee let her be, though the people grew fearful of entering the yard. Sitting by the tulasī, Tukā said to his wife, “Now compose your mind, and sit to listen to the kīrtan.”

She answered, “Though you may be my master, you brought me here by promise—so I will sit by your side and listen.”

Then, seeing they were alone, the devotee gave her spiritual counsel: “Know that the place called Dehu is our home, and we have pledged ourselves to these teachings. Out of a hundred parts, twenty are to be given away in charity; if we fail, the official Kālōjī will impose his fines. If you object to this twenty percent, your mind will be troubled. Instead, let eighty percent remain to support us, and let your heart be content. When the senses are restrained day and night, ten percent of cravings naturally fall away. Freed from desire for the five pleasures, the mind is always at peace. Other bodily acts, known as the five organs of action,

we devote entirely to the service of God, not claiming any doership for ourselves. Thus another ten percent slips away without effort. These twenty percent vanish easily in this way. Yet seventy parts still remain in the body, and those must be surrendered by the Lord's own will. Pāṇḍuraṅga, the great overseer of this place, commands: 'Clear away the rest entirely—pot, vessels, cattle, mold, and all household goods I demand from you.'"

Had I not earlier entrusted the stewardship of my household to another, how then would these goods have fallen into his hands? Therefore, O beloved wife, let your mind grow detached and release me from all claim upon you.

On the bright Dvādaśī which fell on a Monday, I would bathe early and promptly return. Then, summoning the worthy brāhmaṇas, I would freely place the household into their hands. Do not let your mind be troubled over food or clothing—for when Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga, our Father, rests upon our heads, He will never allow us to lack the essentials.

If you would only hear and accept this counsel, your renown in the world would increase greatly. You could even say, "The vessels were taken by others, the cattle died for want of fodder," and thus remain unperturbed. Be firm in mind, like a thunderbolt. Do not think, "There are no calves yet," and cling to fleeting possessions. Rather, break your attachment to the perishable. Bring saints, brāhmaṇas, and holy guests into the home and honor them with offerings in the temple. Become the humble servant of the Vaiṣṇavas; take absolute refuge in the saints. Take the name of Vithobā with loving devotion.

In this manner, Tukā lovingly imparted eleven abhanga-like teachings to his wife—words which, if gathered together, form a complete scripture. Whoever hears them is filled with renunciation. Indeed, these unparalleled sayings of Tukā, when practiced daily, grant the fullness of devotion, wisdom, and detachment—this is certain.

Here, I have only given the essence of that dialogue, without dwelling on every detail. Thereafter, Tukā continued the Harijagar, narrating many divine episodes.

As the sun rose, the morning lamp-ceremony was performed. Sitting beside Tukā, his wife felt a momentary stirring of detachment. At dawn, after bathing, Jijābāī invited brāhmaṇas to the house. But in that very time, all the cattle, calves, grain, and vessels were taken away. Even the ashes in the hearth were gathered up by passing ascetics, who said, "We shall smear this upon our bodies as holy bhasma," and went their way. The pounding-stone, mortar, and pestle were carried off, as well as every empty pot. The only old garment his wife had was thrown out into the courtyard.

At that moment, in the guise of a Mahar woman, the Mother Rukmiṇī Herself came and said to Tukā, "If there be any cloth in the house, give it to Me now."

Tukā pondered inwardly: "This is no ordinary woman; She walks away without glancing back." He quickly went behind the courtyard and drew out a cloth with his own hand. He

gave the garment to the Mahar woman and whispered to her, “Go swiftly from here, and speak to no one of this.”

The village children, seeing this, ran to tell his wife: “A Mahar woman asked for cloth, and he gave it to her, pulling it out himself.”

Hearing their words, her heart turned again toward worldly concerns. “When I bring my husband home by promise, this is the calamity that comes upon us!” she lamented.

“I have pounded grain and managed this household all my life, yet he lets it all fall to strangers and lives on alms! In such a course of life, where will pleasures ever find place for me? By my promise I brought him home, and now he has abandoned everything. If only I had kept faith in Kālīyā’s (Pāṇḍuraṅga’s) feet, He would have provided food and clothing in due measure. But trusting in that alone, my house has been laid bare! Once in the night I remembered His feet twice in my mind—and at once I saw that the household wealth was gone.”

Taking a stone upon her head, Avlī (the wife) hastened toward the temple, vowing, “I will strike the deity of Kālīyā (Pāṇḍuraṅga) to pieces, for He has brought this ruin upon me.”

Thus resolved, she approached the temple at a rapid pace. Inside, the deity of Pāṇḍuraṅga trembled, saying to Himself, “What course should I take now?”

As she entered the temple, Rukmiṇī spoke: “What are you doing here?” Avlī replied, “I will smash His deity—for He is the cause of my misery! My husband gave me much counsel last night, but when I remembered the Lord’s feet just once, poverty came upon me. The brāhmaṇas took all our cattle and grain. The only garment I had, he pulled out and gave away at once. Now I have neither food nor clothing, for my husband has cast away all concern for the body. This is why my heart burns within me.”

Hearing this, the compassionate Mother Rukmiṇī said: “Do not, in your heart, bear anxiety for your welfare. At the proper time, even a mere handful will I provide you, O ancient Mother.”

Then, lo! Rukmiṇī Herself appeared, and with Her own divine hands gave a sari and blouse. But by the time these were gone, Jijābāī came out from within. Seeing her, Tukārām thought within himself, “She has let her mind run to restless haste again. What the Lord had granted with His own hands, she has already given away.” Calling the brāhmaṇas, he divided it among them.

Thus, setting aside all despair, the loving devotee immersed himself wholly in bhajan, singing with deep affection.

Tukārām’s fame spread far and wide, and people from many lands began coming to behold him. Witnessing various miracles, they said among themselves, “Surely, Pāṇḍuraṅga Himself comes in person and takes His meals daily with Tukā.”

This very rumor reached the temple assembly. Hearing it, the presiding deity there was filled with wonder and thought, “Let us summon Tukā here and see for ourselves.”

So, at that time, Śrī Cintāmaṇi Deva sent a message to Tukārām: “Come here today itself, meet with me, and then return home.”

Understanding the Lord’s intention, the loving devotee thought, “Since the Lord Himself has called me, I must go at once to meet Him.”

Thus resolved, he set out immediately, chanting bhajan with single-minded love as he went along the way. Halfway along the path, a messenger came toward him and said, “The Lord has a special purpose and has sent for you without delay. That is exactly my own desire as well,” replied the Vaiṣṇava devotee, and hastening on, he reached Chinchvaḍ and offered obeisance to Gaṇeśa.

At that time, Cintāmaṇi Deva had just bathed and was seated for the evening sandhyā. But he did not yet know that Tukārām had arrived. Seated alone in the temple, the Lord was engaged in mānasa-pūjā. Yet the human mind is so easily distracted—hear now what happened.

In the temple garden, flowers had been planted for the daily worship. The gardener’s neglect had allowed disorder to spread, and the Lord began thinking, “The plants are suffering much; rubbish lies everywhere. I must call the gardener at once and discipline him properly.”

But as soon as this thought arose, the Lord gathered His mind again and resumed concentrated worship, meditating upon Gaṇeśa and offering full honors in the mental pūjā. When He had completed the worship, Cintāmaṇi Deva came out. The Vaiṣṇava devotee, beholding Him, at once fell in full prostration.

But a doubt arose in the Lord’s mind: “Should one bow to a śūdra?” Then, speaking aloud, He said graciously, “Welcome indeed! When did you arrive?”

The loving devotee replied, “When You were engaged in mānasa-pūjā, You went into the flower garden. At that very time, I arrived.”

Hearing Tukā’s words, the Lord was astonished. “Surely,” He thought, “this man speaks the truth—what others say of him must be so.”

Yet one question still lingered in His mind: “They say Viṣṇu Himself dines with him daily. I must ask him of this after the meal.”

The devotee’s renown had grown greatly; even brāhmaṇas now bowed to him. The Lord thought, “If I see a true miracle with my own eyes, I will honor him accordingly. If he is a true bhakta, there will be no delay in recognizing him.”

So He decided: after the meal, I will question him directly. When the time came for the Vaiśvadeva offering, the guest was seated with the honor given to Viṣṇu Himself, and his plate was set among the brāhmaṇas.

Only four hands away from the brāhmaṇas, Tukārām set another two plates. The Lord asked at once, “For whom are these extra plates laid? Is there someone else to dine? If so, invite him in.”

The Vaiṣṇava devotee replied, “One plate is for Rukmiṇī’s Lord, and the other for Gaṇapati. You may call them, Swāmī.”

Sprinkling them with water and intoning the Gāyatrī mantra, Tukā brought Gaṇeśa to mind, offered the food as naivedya, and cast a glance toward Him.

The Lord then asked, “Why do you offer naivedya to Him? Tell me the reason.”

Tukā answered, “Once, while bathing in the ocean, a devotee began to drown. He meditated upon Gaṇeśa, calling upon Him to come. To save him, the Son of Gaurī Himself entered the sea. This is well known, Mother. And so I ask—if Gaṇeśa could come to the ocean to save His devotee, why should I not offer Him food here? This may seem doubtful to You, but if You sit quietly for a moment, You will see the proof.”

Hearing this, the Lord was filled with wonder and said, “Indeed, his state is beyond compare.”

As half a ghaṭikā passed, the elephant-faced Lord Himself appeared. Clad in a radiant yellow garment, He gazed graciously upon them, and the very sight of His form brought new life to the soul, as if nectar had touched their being.

Tukārām then humbly entreated Him, saying, “Now we must call Śrī Gaṇapati Himself, that He may partake of this offering with His own hands, and thus the mind shall be fully satisfied.”

Hearing this, the assembled deities remarked, “How can the manifest form come and eat in person? When the offering is placed before the deity, merely the fragrance reaches Him.”

At this, a Vaiṣṇava devotee declared, “If Śrī Gaṇapati Himself comes and partakes visibly, only then shall the heart find true satisfaction; otherwise, the worship is in vain.”

He continued, “It is like sowing a fertile field—though the crop grows thick, if not a single grain forms within, the labour is wasted. Or as when clouds gather in the sky in great masses, yet not a single drop of rain falls—then all hope is fruitless. Likewise, if the deity does not grant visible vision, the worship, the mantras, all go in vain. Just as a tree or vine without fruit, or a riverbed without water, appears barren; as a beautiful wife without offspring is considered incomplete; as ornaments without a husband, or a body without life; or as great eyes without sight—so too, without the direct vision of the Lord, all worship and devotion lose their true essence.”

Hearing the import of Tukārām's words, Cintāmaṇi marvelled greatly. Then he said to Tukārām, "We have worshipped Śrī Gaṇapati indeed, but to have the deity come and eat in person—such a power we do not possess. You proclaim yourself a heroic Vaiṣṇava who brought even Lord Rukmiṇī's consort under your sway; then likewise bring Gaṇapati here at once, and let Him dine before us now. If the elephant-faced Lord does not come in person, we shall not take food at all. Let us see what this servant of Viṣṇu will do."

Tukārām replied, "By your grace, I shall most certainly have Śrī Gaṇapati dine here in person." Then with loving devotion he sang two abhanga hymns in praise of the Lord: "Victory, victory to You, O Lambodara, ocean of the fourteen sciences and abode of all virtues! O bestower of every perfection, wielder of the battle-axe, elephant-faced Lord! You, at whose feet garlands of waterpots are tied, dance in delight, while Nārada and Tumburu stand aside in wonder, beholding Your marvels. Upon whomsoever Your gracious glance falls, obstacles flee in twelve directions. You protect Your devotees in great calamities, cutting asunder the noose of worldly bondage."

Thus Tukārām offered his praise, yet Gaṇapati did not appear. Tukārām then pleaded earnestly, "I ask not for anything more than what I now request; as You have granted a barren cow to yield milk for Cintāmaṇi's sake, so grant me now the sight of Your form partaking of this food."

Hearing Tukārām's compassionate words, the son of Gaurī was pleased. Then in His manifest form, Lambodara seated Himself upon the dining vessel. Cintāmaṇi, the venerable deity, beholding this wondrous sight, was filled with joy, and with great love he prostrated himself fully before the Lord, offering heartfelt worship. Then Chintāmaṇi said to Tukā, "Now, O Tukā, invite Lord Viṭhobā to join us. That alone will bring true joy to our hearts, for there we shall dine in His very presence."

Hearing this, Tukārām cast his gaze downward for a moment, fixing his inner vision upon the divine form of Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga. The Lord of Rukmiṇī, perceiving the depth of Tukā's loving devotion, was pleased and made Himself manifest. Before Tukā's inward eye stood Śrīpati, dark and tender in hue, bearing the conch and discus in His hands, His crown adorned with jewels so radiant that even the sunlight seemed to pale before them. He wore makara-shaped celestial earrings, and His yellow silk garments shone like molten gold. His auspicious countenance was charming beyond measure, and His lotus feet were adorned with anklets that tinkled sweetly. Such was the wondrous form revealed before the devotee, a sight that filled the heart with boundless bliss. Tukā, seeing the Lord, at once fell prostrate upon the ground, offering full obeisance, his mind overcome with joy beyond measure.

In another seat appeared Lord Gaṇeśa—Lambodara—the beautiful four-armed One, single-tusked, His whole form radiant with vermilion. To Tukārām, the true Vaiṣṇava, and to Chintāmaṇi, the Lord granted simultaneous vision of both deities, though none other could perceive this marvel.

Food had been lovingly served in leaf-plates, and with their own hands both the divine forms partook of the meal. As the rice diminished, the assembled brāhmaṇas beheld the sight and stood astonished, their minds wondering at the mystery. The Lord dined in the row of His devotees; the brāhmaṇas ate in proper order, each being served according to his taste until all were fully satisfied.

Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga and Śrī Moryā, having finished, received water for cleansing their hands from Tukā himself. Betel leaves and areca were then offered, and Tukā, out of pure love, began to massage their holy feet. When the meal was done, both divine forms, after conversing with the devotees, vanished from sight.

Before departing, however, the Chintāmaṇi embraced Tukā with deep affection, and He, with joined palms, bowed at the saint's feet. Seeing this, Tukārām quickly rose, lifting the Lord by His arms, saying, "O Swāmī, it is fitting that I worship Your holy feet—how can this be improper? My Lord is none other than the Master of Paṇḍharī, who dwells in the heart of Bhṛgu and sanctifies all the tīrthas. How then can I, unworthy though I be, be apart from Thee?"

Hearing these humble words, Chintāmaṇi replied, "One should never call a devotee of Viṣṇu low-born or insignificant—this is the teaching of the Bhāgavata. Among mountains, Meru is supreme; among warriors, Rāghava is unmatched; among yogis, Śaṅkara is foremost—so among Vaiṣṇavas you are a hero indeed. Among tīrthas, Gaṅgā is preeminent; among name-chanters, Nārada is foremost; among the siddhas, the son of Anasūyā is the greatest—so likewise, among Bhāgavatas, you are Tukārām. By singing the kīrtan of Śrī Hari, you will one day attain the very form of Brahman itself. This is my firm conviction, born from witnessing your righteous deeds."

Thus, the Lord Himself praised Tukārām with His own lips. Tukā replied, "By Your grace alone, O Lord, I have today beheld Śrīpati with my very eyes." The loving devotee then, with firm faith, received the Lord's command and returned to his village of Dehu.

Tukārām lived in perfect detachment. When gifts of wealth were offered, he would not take them in hand. The listeners, hearing this, became curious and asked the narrator, "Tukā was a householder devotee with children—how then did he manage his household without accepting wealth?"

In answer, the speaker said, "Tukā had three daughters—Kāśībāī, Bhāgīrathī, and Gaṅgubāī—all born in noble families. When the time came for their marriage, his wife, Kānṭābāī, became troubled and asked Tukā, 'How shall we arrange the weddings of our daughters?' Hearing this, Tukā went at once to his maternal home, where he found the children of his kinsfolk at play, and brought them to his house.

That very day happened to be an auspicious wedding date. Calling brāhmaṇas and Vaiṣṇava devotees, turmeric was applied to bride and groom, and the marriage was solemnized without delay. The guests were fed with sweet milk-rice and pancāmṛta. On the next day,

when the bridegroom's father learned of the wedding, he came with the wedding party to Dehu. The devotees provided all the necessary arrangements, and the celebration lasted for four days.

He who has made Śrī Hari his friend receives the grace of the Lord of the Universe; the resident of Vaikuṇṭha will never let His true servant sink in the ocean of worldly existence. Tukārām's in-laws, the Jāmbūḷkars of Mosgāḍe, were devout Vaiṣṇavas. Yet, though surrounded by family ties, Tukā never became entangled in worldly life, for he had wholly forgotten the very notion of bodily existence.

When the Lord desired to redeem the world, He descended in this age of Kali in the form of Tuka. The ignorant could not fathom His glory, yet to the wise He was the friend of all beings, the preceptor of the universe. It was he who, through the sweet service of kīrtana, raised the banner of Vaikuṇṭha even while dwelling in a mortal body. That great Vaiṣṇava saint, that sovereign among devotees, out of his own grace imparted his instruction to me.

Tukā's loving heart often yearned for Āḷandī, and from time to time he would journey there. His eyes ever looked toward the road to Paṇḍharpur, and when he would speak of that sacred place, his voice would falter and his throat would be choked with emotion.

Now, another profound incident took place, which I will narrate with reverence for the ears of the devout. In the Bīḍ district there lived a brāhmaṇa, the deśpāṇḍya of the region, who once came to Paṇḍharpur and took up his residence there. He had undertaken certain tāmasa austerities—severe vows that included abstaining from food—not for the sake of devotion, but in the hope that thereby he might attain mastery over the Purāṇic lore.

For ten days he sat thus in Paṇḍharpur, when in a dream the Lord of that sacred place appeared to him, saying, "Go swiftly to Āḷandī and worship Jñāneśvara there." The Lord explained the manner in which this was to be done, and as the brāhmaṇa heard, his cherished desire seemed already fulfilled. As these words were being spoken, the consort of Rukmiṇī, the Lord Himself, departed, and the brāhmaṇa awoke from sleep.

Recalling the dream, he came to the bank of the river Aḷaṅkāvatī and reflected, "I must obtain both enjoyment and liberation, as well as mastery over the Purāṇas, at once." With such a thought fixed in his mind, he sat down in Āḷandī, vowing to worship Jñāneśvara without partaking of food. But because he did not touch even a morsel, his body became frail.

Twelve days passed in this way, and Jñāneśvara, perceiving the crisis, said, "This brāhmaṇa, lacking merit from former births, is needlessly punishing his body. Let him quickly go to the village of Dehu, where dwells Tukārām, the Vaiṣṇava devotee, who is none other than the direct incarnation of Nāmadeva, descended for the deliverance of the world. If he obtains Tuka's grace and keeps faith therein, his purpose shall be fulfilled."

Thus instructed, the brāhmaṇa awoke from his dream and pondered over it. But in his heart there arose a doubt: “Tuka is of the śūdra caste, a mere merchant—how can my cherished desire be fulfilled by going to him?” Even so, with this doubt lingering in his mind, he set out toward Dehu.

When he came before Tukārām, he related the entire matter in detail. Hearing it, the loving-hearted saint, full of wonder, perceived all that was destined to be. He said, “When the Vedas themselves proclaimed with their own mouth the greatness of the one upon whom rests the boon-bestowing hand of the Lord, Cāṅgadeva himself came to see him, and by divine power caused the very wall to move. Both enjoyment and liberation ever stand waiting at his door, ready to fulfil the desires of all. There stands a golden pīmpal tree at his threshold—can such a Master fail to accomplish your wish?”

Even as he spoke thus, Tukārām reflected within: “When Jnāneśvara has sent a messenger to me, what want can there be in that household? And yet, I am not truly a worthy servant, though among the people my name has been made great. Why has the compassionate Jnāneśvara sent this title to my home?”

Then, turning to the brāhmaṇa, Tukārām said humbly, “I am but a little child among men. Even as a mother churns milk to obtain butter for her child, so will I join letters together and speak words into your ear for your welfare.”

As you had spoken in a manner most fitting, your very words, being perfectly apt, were recited before the people. Yet, deeming that something still remained incomplete before the revered master, Dharaṇekar was sent here with them.

Marvelling within his heart, Tukārām then composed eleven abhanga verses, which the wise and discerning declared to be a scripture of supreme knowledge. Dharaṇekar was seated near him, and Tukārām, in his loving devotion, gave him these verses together with the sacred prasāda, a fruit of great merit. But the Brāhmaṇa immediately cast it aside, saying, “In my heart I desire proficiency in the Purāṇas, yet you have given me something in the vernacular language. Thus have I come here in vain,” and so saying, he departed.

Dharaṇekar went to Alankāvati, where he sat before Jnāna-deva and said, “Fulfil my heart’s desire; therefore do I perform my austerities.” Then, writing thirteen abhangas with speed, he sent a letter to Jnāneśvara. “You have discerned that what I sought was not what was given; you have perceived that it was bestowed without expectation on my part, and in that you have revealed your skill,” he wrote.

“As the weaver chooses her threads and sets them elsewhere, so have I laid down this service at your feet, O Jnāna-deva, and become your debtor. I would not disobey your command; therefore I have given him eleven abhangas, along with a fruit of great merit, and honoured him. Yet his mind was not fixed in faith; casting it aside, he went away. Thus did I send you, O Jnāna-deva, a letter at once.”

Then, at that very time, Jnānarāja summoned Dharaṇekar and pressed him to his service; yet, in his heart, an unworthy thought arose, even as when one sits beneath the wish-fulfilling tree with a pouch to be filled, but instead a wasp enters in, unseen. Or like a pot of nectar suddenly acquired by one with no span of life left, which seems to him like brine, so he casts it away; or as one who beholds the very treasure of perfection with his eyes, yet, being without destiny, departs from it, perceiving it as the flames of fire.

So too is it with the wretched man without fortune who gains a touchstone but deems it a common stone and flings it away on all sides. In this manner did Tukārām give him abhangas of pure import, distilled from the Vedas and Śāstras, yet to Dharaṇekar they appeared a thing of the common tongue, a work opposed to his aim. Abandoning also the fruit of great merit, he returned to Alandi; then Jnāneśvara sent for him and kept him close, as the saints relate.

Meanwhile, in Dehu, the Vaiṣṇava devotee Tukārām, seeing the letter concerning the abhangas, said, “For what reason were these composed? I do not at all understand.” At that time there came a Brāhmaṇa named Koṇḍobā, a strong and stout man, who, happening to pass along the way, took darśana of Tukārām. Not being learned in letters, he harboured no pride; with pure feeling he bowed at once to Tukārām, who, perceiving his sincerity, became pleased. The eleven abhangas that had been written, Tukārām gave to Koṇḍobā, together with the coconut that Dharaṇekar had cast aside.

When Koṇḍobā broke it open at once, he found within it fine and lustrous pearls. In Amdābād there was a wealthy merchant who had vowed to Jnāneśvara that he would offer jewels worth a lakh of rupees upon the saint’s samādhi. When the vow was fulfilled, the merchant came quickly for darśana. In a vision Jnāneśvara instructed him, “Place this before Tukārām.” So, at that very moment, the coconut was laid before him; and that same day Dharaṇekar came again, to whom Tukārām at once gave it.

When he, lacking faith, cast it aside, Koṇḍobā received the treasure. Reading the abhangas with loving devotion, he found that he could understand the Sanskrit sense. Koṇḍobā had been a Brāhmaṇa attached to a royal scholar who daily recited the Purāṇas before Śivājī Mahārāj. Now he came and surrendered himself to Tukārām.

Out of sheer compassion, the saint bestowed upon him both worldly and spiritual joy; at once he attained mastery in the Purāṇas, becoming skilled in the meaning of the Bhāgavata. When the king learned of this, he gifted Koṇḍobā garments and ornaments. Then the royal son pondered in his mind to take the darśana of Tukārām. Day by day, his fame in the world grew more and more; devotees, hearing the clamour of his kīrtana, came to honour and serve him.

Once, a gathering of Vaiṣṇava devotees from Lohagāon came to Alandi while a kīrtana was being sung at the great gate. These noble-hearted renunciants and pious souls humbly clasped Tukārām’s feet, saying, “Please come once to our village.” With steadfast resolve

they prayed thus, desiring that by his coming their āśrama might be made holy. Seeing their deep sincerity, the Vaiṣṇava hero assented.

On the next day they brought Tukārām to Lohagāon with great care, and there they prepared a divine meal, feeding the Brāhmaṇas to their content. A grand maṇḍapa was erected and the space made broad and spacious. That night Tukārām, the hero among Vaiṣṇavas, sang kīrtana, with cymbals and the deep beat of the mṛdaṅga resounding. The very essence of Nāda-Brahman was drawn forth, and the sweetness of divine love filled the air—a taste rare even to Brahmā and the gods.

The graceful speech of Tukārām poured forth; the devout listened with rapt attention, tears of love flowing from their eyes, standing still and silent in wonder. So enraptured were they by the nectar of his divine narrative that none felt drowsiness or weariness. When the sun rose, they waved ārati before the Lord of Paṇḍharpur.

In the next chapter, an extraordinary tale shall be told by the beloved of Rukmiṇī, as attested by the royal seal, recording the wondrous deeds of the saints. Blessed indeed is the Bhakta-Līlāmṛta, for by merely hearing it the heart's desires are fulfilled. Let the loving devotees who hear this savour the sweetness of this thirty-fourth chapter to the full.

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Chapter 35

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (In the name of Śrī Gaṇeśa)

O Śrīhari, Thou art verily the Friend of the forsaken—this is the certain conviction that dwells within my heart. With folded hands I behold Thee standing upon the sacred brick on the bank of the Bhīmā. Thy posture is most graceful and tender; both hands rest gently upon Thy waist. Beholding such a vision of the Lord, clad only in the sky, the very sense of bodily identity melts away.

Thy form is delicate and charming, a tender smile playing upon Thy lips, a light scarf fluttering upon Thy shoulders. Thy gaze is fixed steadily upon the tip of Thy nose, and upon Thy head rests the noble crown. Devout bhaktas come to Thee for darśan; with loving hearts they clasp Thee close, placing garlands of tulasī around Thy neck. Yet, O Lord, even this is not their full satisfaction, for Thy grace is beyond measure.

Even sinners, thieves, those opposed to Brahman, and killers of cows—by the mere sight of Thee are delivered, for Thou hast granted this boon to Pundalika. To reach Vaikuṇṭha is a difficult undertaking for the sādhaka; therefore, out of mercy, Thou hast made Thy abode here in Paṇḍharpur upon this mortal earth. All the holy tīrthas of the three worlds, at noon, gather at the river Candrabhāgā; thus daily the celestials come here in their aerial chariots to bathe.

Such is the unparalleled glory of this sacred kṣetra; there is no other comparison to be given. O Self-delighting Lord of the universe, out of love grant me the inspiration to narrate this in my humble work. This very verse, that has now arisen, Thou hast graciously placed within my heart; I shall inscribe it upon the scroll, and no obstruction shall arise.

O Lotus-eyed Lord, Thou Thyself narratest the stories of Thy own servants; making me merely an instrument, Thou holdest the entire thread in Thy own hands. In the previous chapter it was told how Tukārām had gone to Lohu village, where, by performing kīrtan, he drew the hearts of all. With great effort, Viṣṇudās detained him there for an entire month. Day and night the sound of kīrtan resounded; yet no one ever wearied of it.

Tukā's mind was ever free from worldly desires; to him gold and clay were alike. The local Brāhmaṇas, according to their means, honoured him with food. In order to preserve dharma in the world, saints incarnate even in this Kali age; free from concern for sin or merit, they are ever absorbed in the loving play of devotion.

In that village there was an elderly widowed Brāhmaṇī. With folded hands she entreated Tukārām, "Come to my house for prasāda, and afterwards perform kīrtan there." Seeing her sincere devotion, the bhakta readily agreed, saying, "Very well, prepare the arrangements, and on that day I shall certainly come."

She then laboured with her own hands, earning wages, and prepared the meal for ten Brāhmaṇas. Yet at that time an obstacle arose. In the neighbouring compound there was an old shed leaning against a wall; due to heavy rains, the wall was on the verge of collapse. That very day, the Brāhmaṇī came weeping to Tukārām and said, "The wall will fall today—what shall I do now? I have already prepared everything for the feast in Thy honour."

Tukārām comforted her, saying, "Be at peace; until we have taken our meal, this wall shall not fall. Viṭṭhobā Himself will remove the obstacle—doubt not in the least." The villagers came to witness; the wall leaned heavily but did not fall. All marvelled greatly at this wondrous sight.

For four days thereafter, the Brāhmaṇī herself cooked with her own hands. She brought the food to the temple and worshipped Tukārām with full honours. Together with the Brāhmaṇas, the Vaiṣṇava bhaktas ate with great satisfaction. Then Tukārām said to the Brāhmaṇī, "Now, you also take your meal without delay." When she had finished, the remaining serving vessels were carried outside.

The moment Tukārām stepped out of the temple, the wall behind collapsed completely. The villagers, seeing this, arranged another house for the Brāhmaṇī, and that very night kīrtan was performed there with great love. Wherever saints dwell, all obstacles flee far away; the Lord Himself, bearing the Sudarśana, protects them in countless ways.

After a month, Tukārām swiftly departed from that place. Though he had gained much honour there, he did not remain attached. His fame spread ever more widely, increasing day by day, like the waxing moon of the bright fortnight, full of radiant light. Those who beheld him were filled with joy; yet within the hearts of the envious, bitterness arose.

Just as the taste of milk is hateful to one burning with fever, so the words of saints are displeasing to those filled with pride of learning, age, beauty, or noble lineage. One such was a Brāhmaṇa named Rāmeśvara Bhaṭṭa of Vāgholī, well-versed in the four śāstras, honoured even by the king. Hearing of Tukārām's increasing renown, his heart filled with malice. "This fellow," he said, "is spreading complete hypocrisy."

He resolved to contrive a means to disgrace Tukārām, even by bringing him to trial. "He is of the Śūdra caste," he said, "yet he expounds the essence of the śruti! By his kīrtans he has bewitched the minds of the pious, and even Brāhmaṇas bow to him—this is most reprehensible for us. He speaks of the glory of the divine Name in astonishing ways, and has established the path of bhakti among the people; yet to me this appears as heretical teaching."

Thus speaking, Rāmeśvara stirred up the village officer against Tukārām. The officer in turn sent word to the headman of Dehu, commanding him to drive Tukārām out. The letter was shown to Tukārām, and at that moment, moved by the ocean of compassion within, he uttered an abhanga.

“What shall I now do? To what distant land shall I go?” thought Tukārām. “If the village itself refuses me shelter, where shall I dwell? When the very Lord of this place has denied me refuge, what joy can there be in staying here? The headman is angry, and the villagers will no longer offer me alms. In such company, what happiness is there? I must seek out the Master of Vaikuṇṭha.”

Thus resolving, the brave Vaiṣṇava, raising the loud cry of “Viṭṭhala! Viṭṭhala!”, declared, “Let us go straightway to Vāgholī and meet Rāmeśvara.” Without delay, the loving bhakta set forth. Rāmeśvara was then engaged in his ablutions and evening prayers; Tukārām bowed low before him. With loving fervour he began the chant of the Lord’s Name and, seated in that very place, commenced hari-kīrtan. He spoke poetic verses as offerings of prasāda, holding back no feeling from his heart.

At this, Rāmeśvara spoke sharply: “You are of the Śūdra caste, that is certain. Yet you recite poetry in kīrtan, drawing meanings from the śruti! Without authority, how dare you speak such words? This is contrary to the śāstra. Both the speaker and the listeners of such unlawful discourse will be condemned to the torments of Raurava hell. Therefore, from this day onward, you must cease entirely from speaking such verses.”

Hearing these words, the Vaiṣṇava bhakta felt a quiet satisfaction in his heart. “It was the Lord of Paṇḍharī Himself who commanded me,” he thought, “and I have spoken much because of that command. Yet this speech is but in vain if it goes against His will.” Then he said aloud to Rāmeśvara, “You are a Brāhmaṇa, the very deity of Īśvara. If you have given me this command, then I shall speak no more poetry henceforth. But what of the verses that have already been composed—what is to be done with them?”

When he thus inquired, Rāmeśvara replied, “Take all that you have written with your own hand, and cast it into the water.” “So be it,” said Tukārām, bowing his head in obedience. He returned quickly to Dehu, entered the temple, and upon beholding the deity of Pāṇḍuraṅga, his eyes overflowed with tears. Prostrating fully upon the ground, he bathed the temple floor with his love.

With folded hands he stood before the Lord and said, “O Husband of Rukmiṇī, Thou art the sole doer of all. I am but a wretched, foolish soul. By Thy command, O Viṭṭhobā, have I spoken these crooked and boundless words. Now, if it be Thy will, they shall be drowned in the waters. O Lord Śeṣaśāyī, all rests in Thy desire.”

So saying, the loving bhakta gathered all his notebooks and carried them to the deep pool of the Indrayāṇī. Wrapping them in a cloth, placing stones within, and chanting the Name of Viṭṭhala aloud, he lowered them with his own hands into the waters.

The pious devotees, firm in love, were filled with deep anguish in their hearts; yet the crooked-minded, who bore him envy, rejoiced within. They said, “By his poetry he brought great fame upon himself, but such things do not last in this world—like the colours of a

moth's wings, they vanish in an instant. The learned Brāhmaṇa Rāmeśvara is like the very sun itself; he has destroyed the foundation of falsehood, and this gives us peace."

Some compared it thus: "Just as Jaimini composed the Bhārata, and Vyāsa then submerged it entirely; or as Śaṅkarācārya refuted the Jaina doctrine and cast it away—so too has Tukā's work been drowned." They spoke with scorn, saying, "Jaimini, even in his poetry, preserved an Aśvamedha section; the Jainas preserved the Amarakośa with love. But Tukā has preserved nothing—every page has been sunk in the river. Such is the speech of the perverse, who know not the glory of Viṣṇu."

As for Tukārām, his heart remained serene, filled with joy untouched by sorrow. "The will of the Lord is the only authority here," he said. "Why should I make any useless effort of my own?" Thus setting his mind, he continued his loving devotion.

Five days passed since he had submerged his notebooks. Then the envious Brāhmaṇas and others came together to him, speaking many harsh and unreasonable words. "Formerly," they said, "you put your household goods into the river, thus drowning all your worldly affairs. And now you have drowned your poetry, the writings of highest truth. If there is still more to be destroyed, perhaps you will cast away your very life next? You have sunk both your worldly dealings and your poetry, yet you still show your face among people."

These cutting words pierced Tukārām's heart. "Though my life could easily be ended," he thought, "suicide is condemned in the eyes of the world. My life will not depart of its own accord, so what remedy is there? I shall renounce both food and water, and seat myself at the door of the Lord's temple."

Before the temple there was a great stone in the tulasī garden. The Vaiṣṇava Tukā went at once and sat upon it. In his mind arose deep repentance; counting them, there were thirty-one abhangas upon this subject. "The summit of my devotion has come to this," he said, "that a fault has fallen upon my household life."

On the night of Ekādaśī, after keeping vigil in kīrtan, the fruit of all his effort came to him in the form of a deep burning in his heart. "Ah, Lord," thought Tukārām, "I served Thee with simplicity, and now the testimony of that service has come to me in the form of public shame. When I show my face among people, I feel as though all honour has left me. Until I have renounced my very life, what more can I say to Thee, O Viṭṭhobā? Either bind me to Thee fully, or take my life altogether."

Earlier he had thought within himself, "I should go alone into the forest and sit in solitude." But now the moment had arrived unexpectedly, and there was none to stop him from renunciation. "Once my truth is made manifest," he resolved, "I shall then speak my answer; but for now, even if I were to compose poetry again, it would not bring me any true joy—it would only bring me greater shame."

“The final day of my trial has now come suddenly; the ripened fruit must be tasted before one can speak of its sweetness—who will listen to empty words without experience? My patience will not hold any longer. If you have not yet heard my words, then all the ploughing of the field and the sowing of the seed have been in vain.”

“I have done all that I could, O Viṭṭhala; now no other means remain. I must simply wait for Thy verdict. The path of bhakti has reached its end; I have come and laid myself entirely at Thy feet. My taste for words has gone; the whole world has been filled with noise and confusion. The accusations against my birth are like hanging verses; but if measured truly, they would be weighed in fairness. Such is the course my soul feels in the presence of the Lord of Paṇḍharpur.”

“This, now, is my final resolve; why heap more straw upon the threshing floor in vain? I shall not even touch the pen again. I have given my answer with compassion, and You have turned away from me; all these knots are of Your tying, and now I have made my firm decision. Thou hast rescued countless devotees in the past, O Pāṇḍuraṅga—will You now turn away from this one soul? Why will You not bring about my deliverance from this worldly bondage?”

“You, O Śrīhari, have set Your mind upon me, but I shall no longer run the shop of bhakti. This I have resolved in my heart. When I speak to You with love, O Lord, You come with wrath; when I entreat You with compassion, You give me a harsh answer. Is this truly Thy nature, my Lord? Am I not Thy servant? Tell me, O Master of Paṇḍharpur—why have I cast away all my worldly hopes, enduring such disgrace? Like a child denied milk by its mother, I have been left to suffer hunger; my fame is gone, and I have forgotten all joy of love.”

“How now can I offer praise? How can I speak of holy glory? I have no face to show before men; the path for that has vanished. All the strength of my mind and body is spent; my power and wisdom no longer serve any purpose. Now, whatever Thou dost, O Husband of Rukmiṇī, will come to pass.”

Thus offering his prayer, Tukārām closed his eyes and fixed his mind steadily at the Lord’s feet. In the tulasī garden before the temple there was a great stone; there he lay himself down to rest. He would take neither fruit nor water, nor any sustenance at all; he cast away all bodily awareness.

Though much dishonour had come to him in the eyes of the world, he paid no heed to it; for in the hearts of those opposed to spiritual truth there had long been malice, and this was but the latest cause they had found. The truly devout who had once heard his hari-kīrtans now found their minds troubled, seeing this harsh calamity.

But just as the stem falls away when the fruit ripens, so too does the Lord’s mercy sometimes break through suddenly in torrents. Again and again, loving devotees came to Tukārām with urgent entreaty, yet he would give no reply; he remained unmoved, steadfast as a rock.

His firm resolve was this: “If my life departs through fasting, then let it depart here at the Lord’s door. Living or dying, I have no other cause left.”

Listen now, O discerning listeners. In the village of Vaghole there lived a learned Brahmin named Rameshwar. Though renowned for his scholarship and austerity, a grave sin befell him—he became a persecutor of a devotee. By this act, the Lord Himself was displeased. For even Ravana and Kumbhakarna, though enemies of Lord Rama, attained the state of liberation; yet, for those who hate the Lord’s devotees, there is no deliverance—such are destined for the hell of Raurava.

To protect His devotees, Lord Shri Hari wields His mace and discus, and even secretly inspires in the hearts of non-devotees thoughts that bring about their downfall. The one who cultivates hatred towards a devotee not only destroys his own store of merit but also attracts to himself every form of sin, which settles upon him like an unwelcome tenant.

Now, Rameshwar was indeed a Brahmin of high discipline, bright like the sun itself, accomplished in all four branches of the Shastras, and honored by kings and learned men alike. Yet by harboring malice against a devotee of Vishnu, all his merit began to crumble. One day, he journeyed to Pune for a great holy occasion, seeking the darshan of Lord Shiva. There, in the precincts of the shrine of Nagnath, which was alive with divine presence, Rameshwar’s devotion to that deity was firmly anchored.

It was the auspicious time of Dvadashi, coinciding with Pradosh on a Monday—a festival day of great sanctity. Rameshwar arrived at Pune, and there an incident unfolded. In that place lived a famed fakir named Anagadsha Siddha, a man of deep penance. Without knowing, Rameshwar entered into the garden belonging to this fakir. Two of his students were with him, and as the morning hour for bathing approached, he saw the water there—clear and pure—and immediately stepped into it.

Now, Anagadsha Siddha was at some distance, engaged in his own spiritual observances. As he overheard certain mantras being spoken, he became displeased and uttered words of a curse. He said, “This life of mine, which should have been devoted to my prayers, has been disturbed by him. His body shall burn with fire forever, though no flame be set to it.”

Hearing this, the fakir’s curse began to take effect. Rameshwar’s body grew hot as if consumed by invisible fire, even while in the water. Bewildered, he asked his students what was to be done. They advised him to seek refuge in the fakir and beg for release from the affliction. But Rameshwar, proud of his Brahmin birth and considering the fakir a man of a lower caste, refused outright. “I will never go to such a one,” he declared, holding tightly to his ego.

Yet, as soon as he emerged from the water, the burning sensation intensified. Hours passed, but he could find no relief. His students poured water upon him continuously, but the pain did not cease. Realizing that no remedy was in sight, and that death itself seemed near,

Rameshwar grew deeply anxious. Neither rest nor movement brought relief; his austerities and rituals proved useless in this moment of trial.

The people, seeing his plight, began to speak. Some said, “It is the fakir’s working,” while others whispered, “This is punishment for submerging the abhanga verses of Tukaram.” The Lord Rukmini’s beloved, disturbed by such acts against His devotee, had chosen this as the occasion to act—just as Sudarshana had once pursued the sage Durvasa when he insulted King Ambarisha, a pure devotee of Vishnu.

Rameshwar’s suffering grew so great that all worldly attachments—home, family, wealth—lost their taste. At last, he came to Alandi and clung to the samadhi shrine of Sant Jnaneshwar Maharaj, even binding himself with a rope beneath the Ajana tree. There he sat, day and night, lamenting: “My body is stricken with this great affliction, yet I know not the cause that destiny has laid upon me.”

Meanwhile, in another place, Tukaram himself was enduring hardship, shunned from food and water by those who despised him. But the Lord, assuming the form of a child, came to comfort His devotee: “I am your protector and guardian—why should you fear any blow that falls upon your head? When Prahlada was harassed in countless ways by his father Hiranyakashipu, My enemy, I preserved him at every moment.”

The Lord recounted the wonders of His protection: “When he was thrown from a mountain, I caught him in My many arms; when cast into the ocean, I bore him up as the cosmic tortoise; when hurled into fire, I made the flames cool; when set upon by wild elephants, they saw in him a lion and fled; when serpents were made to bite him, they became as harmless as birds; when he was given deadly poison, it turned to nectar upon his lips. And when his cry pierced the heavens, I burst forth from the pillar as Narasimha, tore his enemy with My claws, and swiftly delivered My devotee.”

“These are not idle tales,” the Lord said. “They are true, sung in the ancient Puranas. Just as I now hold you in My keeping, so I once sat in the waters of the world-ocean, concealed in the heart of the great creation.”

Having spoken thus, the Lord disappeared from sight, yet in the inner lotus of Tukaram’s heart He remained, like a bee hidden in the flower’s depth. The faithful saw Tukaram lying still as wood, his breath scarcely perceptible, while those of crooked mind continued to gaze at him without understanding the divine mystery before them.

Upon the spot where he lay in deep stillness, Tukaram’s body moved not at all. The onlookers whispered among themselves, saying that death had come to him quietly in his sleep. Some said to one another, “His faithful wife perished during the famine, crying out for food with each breath; now the same fate has befallen Tukaram, who is dying of hunger.” But the devout spoke differently: “The blessed Shri Hari Himself protects Tukaram. See how, though his body is without food or water, the divine radiance within remains undiminished.” They reasoned that if his sustenance had truly failed, life would have departed long ago; yet they

could still hear the sound of the holy Name rising from his lips for those who drew near his resting place.

Thus people spoke according to their own minds, but Tukaram himself, within his heart, was filled only with joy. Outwardly, for the sake of the world, he lay bound at the Lord's temple door. Thirteen days thus passed. In the watches of the night, the indwelling Lord of all worlds granted dreams to many, saying: "The dry manuscripts of Tukaram's abhangas, which I preserved in the depths of the waters, now float upon the surface. Go swiftly and bring them forth!"

When morning came, the people went to the water's edge, and indeed, there upon the current floated the volumes, like earthen jars buoyant upon the stream. Then the bhaktas clapped their hands to the sound of the Name, rejoicing greatly, exclaiming, "Tukaram has been blessed by the Forest-Garlanded One—what unparalleled grace is this!" Among them were skilled swimmers who leapt into the river, seized the manuscripts, and brought them ashore, crying, "The Lord of Pandharpur has come to his devotee's aid!"

All assembled then went to the temple and told Tukaram the wondrous news: "For the sake of your pure devotion, the Lord of Rukmini has bestowed His favor." Opening his eyes, the loving bhakta beheld with certainty the truth of their words. At once he composed seven abhangas in praise, filled with deep compassion. He addressed the Lord of Rukmini: "O Shri Vitthala, I have done you great injustice indeed. Listening to the words of men, I caused you certain toil. Yet you kept my mind fixed upon you, guarded my body, and preserved even the manuscripts in the water. Without food or drink for thirteen days, my body survived; and my dry papers remained unharmed in the river. Such a marvel has never before been seen in this world."

"Protector of the destitute, Sustainer of all worlds, I am truly fallen. I committed a grievous wrong by sitting at your temple gate. Let what is past remain in the past; from now on, O Lord of Vitthal, I will not burden you again. Even if the wicked should gather together to take my life, I will not allow you to be troubled on my account. Once, by my error, I caused you hardship, O Dark-Hued One. At the remembrance of this injustice, my voice chokes with emotion. Standing in the water, O Beloved of Lakshmi, you preserved my manuscripts out of pure love, fulfilling in truth the praise sung of you by the saints."

"I have no right to bring calamity upon you, nor did I reflect upon the matter even for the sake of protecting my own reputation. Such slight wrongdoing is like that of parents who, in their anger, wish to strike their own child—a comparison that scarcely befits you, whose heart is full of mercy. Now I am finished with this worldly existence; the burdensome ocean of karma holds no attraction for me. O Lord of Rukmini, Guru of the worlds, grant me steadfastness of mind. The countless waves of thought rise again and again in my heart; in their company my inner being becomes bound. Now I resolve to set aside all anxiety and to make you alone the dwelling of my heart. Ever will I serve you with loving devotion, with no other aim or desire."

When the dry manuscripts emerged from the waters, Tukaram composed those seven extraordinary abhangas of praise, which the saints upon earth cherish as most wondrous. Though Sheikh Muhammad had submerged them for thirteen days, the papers came forth untouched by water, and were eagerly taken up by the faithful, to be renowned throughout the land. The news spread from province to province: "The Lord of Rukmini has Himself preserved these papers!" The event was recounted in answer to every question, like a fragrant blossom whose perfume travels through the sky—so did Tukaram's fame circle the wide earth in that time.

Meanwhile, in the holy field of Alankapur, Rameshwar Bhatt yet sat bound beneath the Ajana tree, his body tormented as though on fire. Day and night he remained there, clothed in woolen garments, his mind fixed upon one great desire—to worship Shri Jnaneshwar and beg His mercy, saying, "May the curse of the Siddha be lifted from me; may he grant me swift compassion. O Vishnu, incarnation upon earth, who has descended in this age for the deliverance of the world, help me!"

Thus praising Jnaneshwar, Rameshwar Bhatt was granted a vision in the night. In his dream the saint spoke clearly: "Among all the devotees, the noble Nama is the foremost, a heroic Vaishnava, and Tukaram is his incarnation, come for the redemption of the world. In slandering him, you have brought about the destruction of your own merit and gathered to yourself an inexhaustible fault, the cause of your bodily suffering. Now, if with sincerity you go to him for refuge, your great affliction will depart, and you will cross the ocean of birth and death. Hatred of a devotee of Vishnu cannot be washed away by bathing in sacred waters; only by surrender to Tukaram will this pain be removed."

At the clear instruction of Jnaneshwar in his dream, Rameshwar awoke with a heart full of remorse. For none in this burning world is there true repentance unless he feels it inwardly; and without repentance, sin will not depart—this is a vow that stands as truth.

Just as Lord Śaṅkara once partook of the deadly halāhala poison and his whole body burned with an unbearable heat, yet by remaining steadfast in the remembrance of Śrī Rāma he became cooled and tranquil, so too was a wondrous change destined for Rāmeśvara. But enough now of extended discourse — if one continues to pile similes, the narration will swell without measure. It suffices to say that, seeing the living example before his eyes, Rāmeśvara was filled with deep and constant repentance.

In this mood, he wrote a letter with his own hand and entrusted it to his pupils, instructing them: "Go to Dehu and convey my account to Tukā." Yet in his heart he thought, "If I go now for darśana, perhaps the Lord will bring some other harm upon me, for I have indeed committed a great wrong."

Meanwhile, news had spread far and wide that the blank sheets of paper — which he had once cast into the water — had miraculously returned intact. Hearing of this marvel, Jnāndev himself appeared to him in a dream and gave a striking parable. Awed by such a wonder,

Rāmeśvara, still trembling with fear, composed another letter, filling it with much praise of Tukārām, and sent it to Dehu without delay.

When the pupils arrived, they faithfully recounted every detail of the incident to Tukā. They added, “A powerful ascetic named Anagaḍa-śā Sidhha has cursed him. He seeks your guidance — what is the remedy for such a plight?”

Hearing of Rāmeśvara’s condition, Tukā’s heart was filled with compassion. He said, “He is a gentle and learned brāhmaṇa. How then did such a misfortune befall him?” For Tukā, who regarded friend and foe alike, never harbored resentment for past enmity. Always looking to the Lord of Paṇḍharī, who is the very embodiment of Brahman, he would wonder what divine play the Lord might now enact.

Out of this compassion for Rāmeśvara, the saint’s heart melted in mercy, and taking up his pen, Tukā composed an abhaṅga, pouring into it his own grace. The students received it in their hands and hastened at once to Āḷandī. Coming before their revered master, they presented the letter and told him the tale with their own lips.

When Rāmeśvara opened and read Tukā’s letter, he found in it a meaning deep and perfectly true. The saint had written, “When the mind is pure and firmly established in certainty, even foes become as friends. A tiger and a serpent may draw near, yet they will not harm you. Poison itself turns to nectar; an act intended to harm becomes a source of benefit. Words of insult and ridicule, when heard, seem as gentle and courteous speech. Even the strongest trials of suffering will bear the fruit of joy. Flames of fire will grow cool when the Compassionate Lord is pleased. Hold one feeling for all beings, loving them as your own self, and then, by the Lord’s glance of grace, the waves of bliss will rise in your own heart.”

In this way was Tukā’s abhaṅga composed. When Rāmeśvara read it, a marvel occurred: the very moment his eyes beheld the line, “The flames of fire will grow cool,” the burning agony caused by Anagaḍa-śā’s curse subsided entirely. The fire that had tormented him day and night was extinguished in an instant. Such was the undeniable proof of the saint’s grace.

Overcome with repentance, Rāmeśvara fell prostrate before Tukā, his eyes brimming with tears. He declared, “Blessed is the greatness of the saints! I have studied the Upaniṣads and Vedānta in their entirety, yet I possess no power to rescue even a blank sheet of paper from the water. He alone who is the true teacher of the world can carry souls across the ocean of birth and death. Such is Tukā — may all cherish this truth and live joyfully in love.”

As Rāmeśvara was approaching for darśana, Tukā perceived this inwardly and said, “We shall ourselves go forward and meet this noble brāhmaṇa.” So speaking, he set out at once, and midway along the road the two met face to face.

Rāmeśvara said humbly, “You are a supreme devotee, a hero among Vaiṣṇavas. Not knowing this, I, a wretched fool, cast your sacred writings into the water. I did not realize

that you had taken birth in this mortal world solely for the deliverance of all beings. In my ignorance, I opposed your greatness and thus brought misfortune upon myself."

Tukā replied gently, "And I, too, am but a lowly and unworthy renunciant. Yet I ever long for the uninterrupted mercy of the Lord."

Hearing this reply, Rāmeśvara said, "That abhaṅga you wrote with your own hand — it was your grace in full measure, and it has indeed saved me. Now that we have met, I cannot bear to part and return to my home." Resolving thus in his very heart, he walked on with Tukā.

In the following chapter, the wondrous sweetness increases yet more, as the beloved of Śrī Rukmiṇī grants fearlessness to a certain king and himself unfolds the true import of the sacred narrative. The Bhaktīlīlāmṛta, upon hearing, fulfills every desire; the loving devotee who listens to it with pure heart shall find joy unending. Thus concludes the thirty-fifth chapter, filled with nectar-like rasa.

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Chapter 36

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Śrī Gaṇeśa)

In order to help beings cross the ocean of worldly existence, the sādhakas perform various observances. As for myself, I know nothing beyond describing the virtues of the Lord's true devotees. Others, renouncing bodily attachments, set out on the path towards the snowy Himalayas; I, on the other hand, having become a bard of saints, clearly sing forth their wondrous deeds. Some remain immersed in yogic disciplines, some wander ceaselessly to holy places; but apart from the sacred lives of saints, nothing else finds a place in my heart. Some, having amassed wealth, engage in sacrifices and ritual observances with great effort; yet my only wish is to offer praise to the devotees of the Lord.

Some delight in performing virtuous deeds, daily upholding the five great sacrifices; others study the scriptures of spirituality, bringing their meaning into the focus of meditation. Some, through breath-control, behold all beings as equal; some dedicate themselves to the mental worship of the Lord, placing all their love therein. Some attain the bodiless state even while dwelling in the body; some dwell in forests; some, having studied the sacred texts, expound spiritual knowledge to the people.

Others serve the Sadguru with deep devotion, yearning thereby for liberation in oneness with God; but my only desire in my heart is to extol the glory of saints. Without this, whatever else may come is of no value to me — O Lord, You are the inner witness and know this truth. If I have made such a resolve, grant it fulfillment, and let my life's āśrama bear fruit.

In the preceding chapter was narrated the beautiful story of how Rāmeśvara troubled Tukā, throwing all his account-books into the river — yet the Compassionate Lord preserved them. Because of a curse from Siddha, Rāmeśvara suffered grievous bodily affliction; but upon taking refuge in Jnāneśvara, the latter appeared to him in a dream and told him all in detail. Filled with deep remorse, he set out with difficulty, and halfway on the journey they met each other.

Later, upon arriving at Āḷandī, Tukā saw his friend Jnāndev with his own eyes. When people heard of this blessed meeting, they flocked in great numbers to have their darśana. The dried account-books that had been cast into the water now appeared in different lands, and devotees came from afar to behold Tukā and his miracle. On inquiring from Jnāndev, the heroic Vaiṣṇava Dehū came speedily, and Rāmeśvara, the master of six śāstras, was never far away. Renouncing attachment to learning, lineage, sons, wife, property, wealth, social honor, and prestige, he clung to the feet of the Sadguru.

This news also reached the ascetic Anagaḍśā Bāwā. Hearing that Tukā had certainly removed Rāmeśvara's curse, he said, "Even though I never came to him for refuge, Tukā has restored

my health. Now I must go and take his darśana, to behold such a wonder." Speaking thus, the mahant left from Pune without delay.

On the way lay the village of Cincavaḍ, where the devoted Gaṇapati is worshipped. Going at once to the temple door, a faqīr said, "Bring me alms." He held out his food vessel, requesting that it be filled quickly. The temple caretakers brought large amounts of provisions, but the vessel did not fill at all, and all were astonished. Inside the sanctum sat Cintāmaṇi; when told that a faqīr stood outside with an unfillable bowl, he commanded that the visitor not be sent away empty-handed. "Whatever grain is in the house," he ordered, "place it in his vessel."

The caretakers obeyed, yet still the bowl would not fill. Then they brought out lumps of jaggery, but still the bowl remained empty. Seeing this, Cintāmaṇi himself came out of the shrine, performed a miraculous act, and filled the vessel with his own hands. The faqīr then departed quickly and went to Dehū, entering Tukā's temple.

Inside, Avalī was preparing food. Outside, the faqīr called out, "Mother, quickly bring me flour to fill my bowl." At once Avalī retorted, "Which dead soul has come begging now?" But as she followed after him, she found there was no grain left at home.

Gāṅgā, the young daughter, took a handful of flour, but Avalī snatched it from her. Meanwhile the faqīr stood outside, watching with interest. Gāṅgā came out and poured a little flour into his bowl — and lo! the vessel was filled to the brim, to the wonder of Anagaḍśā. Realizing his own power had failed, and seeing the marvel, he gently stroked the girl's head and asked, "Is your name Tukobā?" Hearing this, Gāṅgā replied, "Why do you speak like a madman? Do you not know?"

"Early in the morning, after bathing, my father sits in the temple," she said. When Anagaḍ heard this, he declared, "Then I shall go at once to have his darśana." Filled with love, he offered full prostrations and remained there two days, listening to the Hari-kathā. During kīrtanas that lasted four watches, he sat in front, receiving honor and respect from the heroic Vaiṣṇava.

Hearing Tukā's stories, the faqīr's heart was filled with contentment; taking leave of Tukā, he returned to his own maṭh. Daily in Dehū, kīrtana resounded, and great crowds came for the pilgrimage. Among them was a certain beautiful woman, youthful and charming, whose heart burned with the fever of passion… During one such kīrtana, when the gathering had dispersed, Tukā was approached in solitude by a certain woman. With a restless intent arising in her heart, she said, "My desire has long been to unite with you in passion." For many days she had sought such an opportunity, and now, finding a moment alone, she spoke thus.

Hearing her words, the Lord's devotee trembled inwardly, just as the great yogi Śuka was once shaken in his mind upon beholding the celestial Rambhā. Immediately rising from his seat, Tukā composed himself and spoke a few verses of counsel to her: "A woman who belongs to another is to me as my own mother; it is not my way to speak otherwise. The six

enemies that dwell in the body I have surrendered entirely at the feet of Viṭṭhoba; having renounced all great powers, what place is left here for the disturbances of bodily nature? Go now at once, O mother, for your effort will be in vain." Speaking thus, the Vaiṣṇava returned to his seclusion, engaging himself in bhajana with loving devotion.

When the dawn broke, the sound of cymbals and the cry of "Victory to Viṣṇu!" arose from the temple as the pilgrimage gathered.

One day, people from Lohi village came to invite Tukā with great affection and effort, and they brought him to their village. With Tukā came certain chief companions — foremost among them the learned brāhmaṇa Rāmeśvara Paṇḍit, who never returned home once he had joined the saint; Tukā's younger brother, Kānhobā; Gaṅgājī Mawāl, another brāhmaṇa who also would not leave; and Santājī the oil-presser, greatly devoted, who sat nearby writing abhaṅgas. Fortunate indeed was he, for he enjoyed the saint's company at all times.

These four were the chief, though many others would join later, singing the refrains in kīrtana and moving with loving fervor. As the loving devotees drew near to Lohi, the townsfolk came forward to greet them and bowed with reverence. Whoever's home hosted Tukā's kīrtana felt supreme joy in the heart. They prepared feasts in many ways, serving brāhmaṇas in the temple; according to each one's means, they offered their worship. The wealthy arranged thousands of meals, making this their way of honoring the kīrtana.

In that town all were devoted — save one, Śivājī Kānsār, a great miscreant: a slanderer, crooked and miserly, despised even among worldly men. Tukā told everyone, "Call Śivājī to the kīrtana," but he refused utterly, speaking ill and mocking.

At that time, in the city of Aḷankāpūr there was a brāhmaṇa in charge of the temple property (brahmasva), who, through misfortune, had fallen into debt of ten thousand coins, and for that reason had given up even taking food. After six months, Jnāneśvar appeared to him in a vision and said, "Go quickly to Tukā; he will surely clear your debt."

The brāhmaṇa, searching diligently, came swiftly to Lohi and told Tukā, "Jnāneśvar himself has sent me." Tukā, understanding the inner purpose, said nothing more to him, but told the villagers, "Go and bring this man to Śivājī Kānsār's house; do not let my word be broken."

Śivājī, however, unwilling to spend even a little, grudgingly gave two copper coins. Then Tukā picked up a stone and rubbed it against them — at once they turned to gold, which he handed to the brāhmaṇa. The latter said, "This is not enough to pay my debt." "Have you any copper?" asked Tukā. The villagers, astonished — for they were dull with worldly pleasures — watched as the brāhmaṇa brought various copper vessels. Tukā touched them with the stone, and they all became gold.

Rejoicing, the brāhmaṇa returned to Aḷandī. Tukā cast the stone into the river Bhīma near Barave. As for Śivājī Kānsār, the faithless sinner — seeing this marvel, he said, "So Tukā possesses the philosopher's stone!" and at once began to attach himself to the saint. He

resolved, “Let me serve him and thus end my poverty,” and so began listening to the kathā, though in his heart his devotion was of another kind.

Like the bitter fruit of the nīm tree, which appears golden on the outside, so was he — performing acts of devotion outwardly, yet inwardly cherishing worldly desire. His observances were intense, but his heart’s longing was still fixed upon the fruits of the world.

For a full year, Śivājī Kānsār listened to the Hari-kīrtanas, and in due time the Lord of Rukmiṇī was pleased with him — for a special reason which shall now be told. Once, in order to bring goods to Mumbai, he had sent out thirty-six bullock-loads. His agents, returning with the laden carts, found that the entire cargo had turned into pure silver. The merchants from whom it had been purchased took back the silver and returned the bullocks. When the moneylender examined his accounts, he declared, “This is certainly not of our doing.”

Thus the bullocks, loaded again, returned to Lohi village. Śivājī was astonished and asked Tukā about it. The Sadguru said at once, “This has happened through your destiny — the Lord of the Discus has favored you. Why not now employ it for a noble purpose?”

Śivājī, desiring to do good, built a great stone well, which came to be known as the Kānsār Well, and he gave much in charity, delighting many brāhmaṇas with food offerings. From that time onward, Śivājī Kānsār’s heart turned greatly towards renunciation. He abandoned home and worldly ties, remaining constantly with Tukā.

But his wife, far from sharing his devotion, bore great enmity towards Tukā. She would say, “This saint has made my husband mad and keeps him here always.” Day and night, kīrtanas were sung, and she would not allow him to rest at home. Determined to harm Tukā, she devised a wicked plan.

She boiled water in four great pots, heated it to scalding, and placed it within the house. Then, bringing Tukā inside under some pretext, she made him sit upon a low seat, placing his feet in a vessel. She then poured the boiling water over them — but the saint, unaware of her deceit, sat peacefully. As the searing water touched him, he cried, “O Lord of Lords, what fire has suddenly seized my body!”

He spoke one abhaṅga, and immediately the pain vanished — for the boiling water had become cool and refreshing, like a holy bath. After bathing, he partook of a light meal, but among the offerings was secretly mixed poison. Yet for one who dwells in the bodiless state, as Tukā did, neither poison nor pain could bring harm; the Lord of Rukmiṇī Himself bore the joys and sorrows that befell His devotee.

But the Lord of Paṇḍharī was displeased with the woman’s malice. As Tukā departed from that place, she was struck down by a wasting leprosy, her life in torment. When Śivājī returned home, he saw her lying distressed. A flower-garland was on the seat, and he recognized it — “Last night during the kīrtana, this garland was around Tukā’s neck. She must have taken it, intending some mischief against the saint.”

When this was told to Rāmeśvara Bhaṭṭa, he advised, “Go to the place where Tukā bathed; smear yourself with the mud from there, and you will be healed.” She did so with sincere feeling, and at once the Lord’s grace came upon her — the leprosy vanished entirely, and her life was spared. From that day onward, she too became devoted, listening always to the kīrtanas and abandoning all former enmity.

Indeed, the deeds of Tukā are many, and to countless people the Lord granted vision through him. It was he who preserved the Abhanga account-books when Rāmeśvara cast them into the water — a deed performed by the will of the Lord of Rukmiṇī.

Hearing of such pure fame during the month of Śrāvaṇa, Śivājī Rājā was filled with wonder. He said, “Call Tukā here, so I may hear his kīrtana with my own ears.” He sent a royal umbrella, a horse, and an officer as a summons to Lohi village. The messenger delivered the royal word, saying, “The king greatly longs to meet you; come and grant him the shelter of your presence.”

Hearing this message, Tukā felt deep contrition. “O Lord of Paṇḍharī,” he prayed, “why have You thrown me into such a situation? Pride, vanity, and worldly display — all these are like pig’s filth to me. O Ocean of Mercy, Embodiment of Consciousness, save me now!”

Thus praying, the Vaiṣṇava saint composed four abhaṅgas and gave them to the officer to take back. The officer said, “The horse I brought is fierce; mount quickly.” Tukā replied, “This one is very ill-tempered; who would let anyone ride it?” The officer insisted. Then Tukā patted the horse’s back, and at once it became gentle — an amazing miracle of the saint.

When the officer returned and told all this to the king, Śivājī was filled with wonder. He read the four abhaṅgas Tukā had sent and pondered their meaning with great attention.

Seeing the saint’s state of perfect detachment, the king pondered within himself, “I must go without delay and meet Tukārām with love and reverence.” With this resolve, he set forth, carrying with him garments, ornaments, offerings for worship, and trays filled with gold coins. The noble king departed in full royal splendour, accompanied by his ministers and many eminent courtiers, and came to Lohagaon.

The people of that village, all ardent devotees, received him with joy. It was like beholding the birth of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Mathurā, yet tasting the immeasurable bliss of Gokula. Even so, the love of Tukā was experienced in full abundance at Lohagaon. At night, they listened to the divine sports of Śrī Hari; and when dawn broke, the cowherd Lord Himself seemed to have arrived. That joy knew no bounds, for wherever love and compassion dwell, happiness becomes limitless.

Thus did King Śivājī Mahārāj come swiftly to meet Tukārām. Prostrating fully upon the ground, he bowed with reverence in the presence of his ministers. In his own hands he bore a basil garland, and personally adorned the saint with it. A tray heaped with gold coins was placed before the saint as an offering of the royal treasury.

Yet the moment Tukārām's eyes beheld that wealth, his heart recoiled from it. Then, with the graciousness of divine speech, he addressed the king: "Why bring such riches here? Let there be for us but one possession — Śrī Viṭṭhala Himself. Without Him, all else is but the stirring of worldly desires.

"We have indeed heard much of your fame, O King, but today we witness your generosity. Yet know this — in the heart of a Vaiṣṇava, the love for wealth does not dwell. Why then offer it with such affection? If one were to visit the radiant sun, what need would there be for a lamp? If clouds pour rain upon the ocean, is the ocean in any way enriched? What comfort does the cool breeze bring to the Himalayas? What refreshment does sandal-paste offer to the moon? If one were to lead a milch-cow to the Ocean of Milk, would it gladden His heart? If mountains of gold are heaped before Mount Meru, is it made any richer? To bring us wealth is like offering us the flesh of a cow. Yet I will tell you what will truly gladden us. Wear the basil beads about your neck. Observe the Ekādaśī fast. Without such vows, the treasures of a kingdom seem to me no more than dust. Our only wish is that you call yourself a servant of Viṭṭhala."

Hearing these words of Tukārām, the king was filled with joy. The gold he had brought for the saint, he distributed among the brāhmaṇas. That night, he attended the saint's kīrtana, drinking in Tukārām's blessed words.

The kīrtana began with auspicious invocation, the remembrance of Hari resounding like thunder. The clash of cymbals and the beat of the mṛdaṅga filled the sky with sound. With delight and certainty, they sang and danced in supreme bliss. Clapping of hands and snapping of fingers resounded in abundance, and the wondrous mood deepened.

In the midst of that divine assembly, Tukārām declared, "Viṭṭhala is our mother and father, our brother, our friend, our uncle. Apart from Him, I have no attachment. Viṭṭhala is my companion, my treasure, my secret refuge, my very life's solace. He is my only confidant in solitude, my fullness in the midst of the world. Without Him, my eyes refuse to see another. Should my tongue praise any other, let it instantly fall silent. If my mind should take delight apart from Him, let it bring me nothing but disgrace. If my feet walk not the road to Paṇḍharī, let them at once grow lame. I have given this body wholly to the service of Viṭṭhala; the conveniences of worldly life I have cast aside. Without Him, the words of even the knower of Brahman are to me but empty wind, unfit for a saint's ear.

"O listeners," he said at last, "this perishable world shall indeed pass away. Therefore sing the name of Viṭṭhala — only thus shall you cross the ocean of birth and death."

So saying, Tukārām raised the cry of the Lord's Name, and the assembly roared in unison. Hidden in the heavens, the gods looked on in wonder. All present were certain that Viṭṭhala Himself was both listener and speaker in that gathering.

Hearing such a kīrtana, the king's heart was pierced with the arrow of renunciation. "Let me renounce my kingdom this very moment and dwell in the forest, worshipping Śrī Hari!" he declared. Removing his royal headgear, he placed it instantly upon the ground.

When dawn broke and the auspicious ārati was offered, the king bowed low before Tukārām and withdrew into the solitude of the forest, there to remain in the quiet service of the Lord.

Tukaram Maharaj, perceiving the tender spiritual state of Shivaji Maharaj, instructed the royal ministers and courtiers not to come near him for any worldly discussion. The king, detached from mundane matters, began to relish the bliss of devotional love. During the day, he would remain in the forests in solitude, and at night, he would join the villagers for kirtan.

The ministers, witnessing this change, wrote a detailed account to his mother, Jijabai. On hearing the report in its entirety, Jijabai wept openly before all, exclaiming that Tukaram had now caused her son to abandon the kingdom — a news she could hardly call auspicious. Without delay, she set out in a palanquin and reached Lohgaon swiftly. On seeing Tukaram seated upon the ground, she offered a full prostration.

Unfolding her sari's end, with eyes brimming with tears, she said, "By your kirtans, one of my sons has already renounced and gone to the forest. Now this one too has sat down in detachment. And he has no son of his own — who then will bear the burden of the kingdom?"

Hearing this, what did the valiant Vaiṣṇava reply? "When Shivaji comes for the kirtan tonight, I will speak to him a few words. You, meanwhile, should remain calm in mind and worship Lord Vitthala."

Accepting Tukaram's words, Jijabai bowed to him and said, "If you will return my son to me, only then shall I be freed from this distress."

That night, when the Hari-kirtan was arranged, Shivaji, the beloved of the people, came to listen. Seeing the occasion, Tukaram began to explain the duties of the karma-kāṇḍa (prescribed righteous conduct). "To cross the ocean of worldly existence," he said, "one essential means is foremost — each one must follow his own prescribed dharma. There is no other way. If a man abandons his own dharma thinking another's to be superior, he does not thereby attain liberation. Such is the decision of the scriptures."

Then he illustrated his point with many examples: "If a fish leaves the water and enters clarified butter, how shall it live? If a bird leaves the sky and tries to crawl into a burrow, will it easily fit? A rat chased into its hole is not saved if a snake is within; if food is swallowed by a serpent, will it keep the eater alive? A tree cannot walk to another place; it must grow where it has sprouted. Likewise, can man remain fixed if he forsakes the station appointed to him? If an Arab steed is made to pull a plough, will it be proper? If a soldier sits upon an ox, will he fight well in battle?

“There is no reason for me to multiply examples — abandoning one’s own dharma leads to grievous ruin. The Lord, having created the world, assigned to each being its own duties: creation was entrusted to Brahmā, preservation to Viṣṇu, the bearing of the earth to Śeṣa, the holding of the oceans to Vāsuki, and the encircling bounds of the world to the seas. The Sun was appointed to shine and give warmth, the Moon to bestow coolness, the seasons to act in their appointed times, and when life’s span is ended, Time strikes down the body without fail. This is the sure ordinance of God; all created beings follow it exactly. But whoever transgresses the commands of the śruti falls instantly into ruin.

“The duties of a brāhmaṇa are clear — in brahmacarya, he must learn the scriptures; in the householder’s life, he must engage in the six sacred acts; in vānaprastha, he must strive day and night to conquer the senses; in sannyāsa, he must renounce all resolves. A brāhmaṇa who forsakes his family dharma is known as a paramahaṁsa, but this is only upon the Lord’s own command.

“Now hear also the conduct of a kṣatriya. He must meet the enemy face to face and protect his subjects by upholding his own dharma. Just as a man nourishes the limbs of his own body, or a loving father goes home to see his family, so too a righteous king must seek the happiness of his people. There is no merit greater than this when guided by true wisdom. For the sake of attaining the Lord, a kṣatriya must give generously, never deceiving in body, speech, or mind.

“Alongside brāhmaṇa and kṣatriya, the vaiśya and śūdra also have their own dharmas. Whatever one’s station, he must hold God in his heart and never harm another. In devotion, there must be love. Merchants may carry on trade, but they must never speak falsehood, for no sin is greater than deliberate untruth. In all beings, one must have compassion; the hungry must be fed; false words must never be spoken; and the Lord’s name must be remembered always.

“Holding to such a state, on may live happily in the world — why then should one flee to the forest? Even at home, Śrīhari can be attained.”

Thus flowed Tukaram’s words of instruction. All the listeners drank them with their ears, and the king stood silent, his mind deeply moved, his eyes shedding tears. With love, the name of Hari thundered forth and the auspicious ārati was performed. Bowing to the Lord of Rukmiṇī, Tukaram offered full prostrations.

To all the assembled devotees, prasād of sweet offerings was distributed. The king, understanding the saint’s mind, presented garments to him. Then Shivaji’s grandmother approached and touched Tukaram’s feet, saying, “How can I ever repay my debt to you? I see no means.”

For four more days the prince remained there, and during that time another profound episode occurred. There was a gardener named Nāvji in that village, a deeply devoted soul. One day during the kirtan, he said to Tukaram, “Maharaj, please stand for a moment so that

I may take your place and you may rest." Then, filled with love and singing the holy name, he began to dance in perfect inner joy.

Immersed in the sweet rhythm of chanting Lord Viṭṭhala's Name, he danced in supreme bliss. As the clapping of cymbals resounded in joy, his heart was wholly drawn to Govinda. For four full hours he continued the kīrtana, singing and dancing in devotion until his body, drenched with perspiration, could bear no more, and he sat down exhausted.

Then Tukārām Mahārāj rose to lead the kīrtana, and with his infinite skill and spiritual fervor, he filled the assembly with divine delight. From that moment onward, the gardener devotee Nāvājī Māli would no longer waste his days. He would string countless garlands from flowers brought by the cowherd women, and when the kīrtana assembly gathered, he would place those garlands upon the necks of the venerable brāhmaṇas. Whenever Nāvājī came to the kīrtana, he would say with heartfelt emotion, "Now my very life-breath has arrived!" Such words, uttered with pure Vaiṣṇava love, would astonish all who heard them.

The attendants would quickly hand Tukārām the edge of his garment to tuck in, and, with a bright smile, he would step forward and dance before the Vaiṣṇavas. Nāvājī would humorously declare, "What is so strange in going to Dvārakā? I go to Paṇḍharpur every day!" The listeners, hearing such playful speech, would laugh heartily, and Nāvājī, overjoyed, would dance with even greater love.

In that assembly there was a learned brāhmaṇa who, going to the tank for his bath, sought to make sport of Nāvājī. "You speak untruth," he said mockingly, "claiming you go daily from Dvārakā to Paṇḍharpur. Such falsehood will certainly bring you ruin." Hearing this, Nāvājī wrinkled his nose in displeasure and said, "From this day forward, I shall not speak so again. Your instruction is indeed good." Resolving thus within himself, the brāhmaṇa returned home—only to find his speech had suddenly failed him, and no words could pass his lips.

The news of this strange happening was quickly written down and brought to Rāmeśvar Bhaṭṭa, who immediately told Tukārām Mahārāj. Meanwhile, a certain farmer brought a freshly harvested sugarcane stalk, wishing in his heart that Tukārām would partake of it. Reading the man's heart, Tukārām split the cane into four pieces with his own hands, ate three portions at once, and left one remaining.

Then Rāmeśvar Bhaṭṭa spoke: "Should we not give some of this prasāda to all?" Viṣṇudās replied, "That would not be fitting. That is why I have eaten it all." Nevertheless, half a piece was given to the brāhmaṇa who had lost his speech. At the very instant he partook of Tukārām's prasāda, his voice returned, and the remaining portion was distributed to everyone. Some who placed it in their mouths found it extremely bitter, and secretly spat it out.

That night, as the kīrtana was being prepared, Nāvājī Māli came and told Tukārām, "I will not lead the kīrtana." Tukārām gently replied, "It was we who were at fault. Your words

were spoken out of pure love, and are dear to God Himself." Hearing this, Nāvājī's heart overflowed with joy, and for four full hours he again danced in the kīrtana with great love.

For four days thereafter, King Śivājī Rāya remained there, daily listening to the kīrtana's sweet sound, filled with devotion. When the time came for him to return to his capital, he approached Tukārām for permission. Concealing his own wish in his heart, he thought, "If my kingdom is to remain secure, my Master will give me a loaf of bread. If I am to be blessed with a son, He will give me a coconut." Reading the king's thought, Tukārām gave him both the loaf and the coconut. The king offered his full prostrations and departed.

Kondabhaṭṭa, the royal purāṇika, always remained near Tukārām, and even Rāmeśvar, who had once mocked him, became a loving devotee. These two brāhmaṇas were deeply learned in the Vedas, and along with fourteen other Vaiṣṇavas who had renounced worldly life, they stayed constantly in his company. Without asking anyone's leave, whenever Tukārām went to another village, they would all follow him, bound by the cord of love, eager to hear his words.

The sacred Śrī Bhakta-Līlāmṛta is a wondrous scripture, like the full ocean of milk, in which Lord Śeṣa reclines eternally with Lakṣmī upon His breast. Fortunate listeners, filled with love, come as if to behold the gods themselves, and daily partake of the nectar of saints' lives with deep devotion. Through this alone, one becomes surely freed from the cycle of birth and death, never to return again, attaining the bliss of union with the Lord.

He, the Friend of the forlorn, the Ocean of Compassion, the Beloved of His devotees, granted fearlessness to the king and spoke the very words that convey the essence of this work. Truly, the Śrī Bhakta-Līlāmṛta, even by hearing, fulfills all desires. Let the loving devotees, eager to listen, receive this thirty-sixth chapter with joy.

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Chapter 37

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (In the name of Śrī Gaṇeśa)

Just as the sky's deep blue stretches boundlessly in all directions, so does Thy divine form, O Śrī Hari, radiate with ineffable beauty. Thy crown, adorned with pearls and precious gems, glistens like the newly risen sun's tender rays. Thy face, like a fully blossomed lotus, is moistened with the nectar of compassion. Thy eyes, wide and pure as the petals of the ajinī flower, shine with a serene and steady brilliance.

Seated upon a golden diadem, Thy earrings—curved in the form of makaras—glisten and sway gently with Thy movement. Thy teeth sparkle like a row of flawless jewels, and upon Thy bosom shines the Kaustubha gem, radiant like the rising full moon. Thy dark-hued form, deep as a rain-laden cloud, is anointed with a delicate layer of sandal paste, and Thy yellow silken robe glows like a streak of lightning.

On Thy wrists shine heroic bangles; upon Thy abdomen are three graceful folds, and on Thy chest rests the Śrīvatsa mark, fresh and charming like a cluster of bees resting upon tender hair. Thy posture is graceful and youthful; a soft garland of tulasī rests upon Thy neck. Both hands are placed gently on Thy hips, and Thy tender feet are set upon the sacred brick.

That which is the very object of yogis' meditation, and the Deity worshipped by Nīlakaṇṭha Śiva Himself—Thou hast now taken form with qualities and beauty, solely for the protection of Thy true devotees. Having enshrined Thy beautiful form in my heart, I now inscribe it upon the leaves of my writing. Grant me, O Lord, the boon of fearlessness, so that I may narrate the glorious lives of the saints.

In the preceding chapter, the account of Saint Tukārām's holy fame was told, and how the great King Śivājī, hearing of his renown, came to meet him and was filled with joy. Four months after this meeting, the King returned to Dehu, and certain wondrous events took place there, which shall now be narrated.

At one time, while on pilgrimage to the sacred Bhīma–Śaṅkara and to holy Puṇyā, Śivājī Mahārāj also came to Dehu to have darśana of Lord Cintāmaṇi. Upon seeing Tukārām, a Vaiṣṇava devotee of pure heart, he bowed with deep reverence. The meeting between these two was one of mutual joy.

As pilgrims began to gather outside for the journey, the merchants of the town arranged palanquins and supplies for the yātrā. When all the provisions were assembled, Lord Cintāmaṇi addressed Tukārām, saying, "O loving Vaiṣṇava, will you not give us some prasāda here? Even if you offer us provisions enough only for ourselves, our desire will be fulfilled."

Hearing these words, Tukārām's heart rejoiced. He immediately returned to his humble dwelling and brought what he had—some flour, pulses, rice, and ghee—enough for a single household. But the entire company of pilgrims had by then arrived and requested prasāda. Seeing their faith and affection, the saint prayed, "O Lord of Rukmiṇī, Master of all gods, Thou must provide all the necessary provisions."

As he thus prayed, Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga Himself came unseen, and from that small store of offerings, there was enough to serve every single pilgrim to full satisfaction. Witnessing this wondrous act, Lord Cintāmaṇi was struck with awe, and thought within himself, "How could such abundance come forth here without any visible means?" Embracing Tukārām with deep affection, he then had the food prepared and served, seating the saint in the honoured place.

When the meal was over, all but one remained behind, listening to Tukārām's kīrtana until the break of dawn, when the yātrā continued its journey. Meanwhile, another brāhmaṇa had gone to seek blessings from Jnāndev at Ālandi. There, in a dream, the Sadguru told him, "Go to Tukārām. Whatever he gives you, bring it back." Awaking from the vision, the brāhmaṇa went straight to Dehu and narrated the dream.

Tukārām, however, was troubled at heart, saying, "Why does Pāṇḍuraṅga increase my worldly burdens among people? I am a helpless soul and know not the ways of siddhis. Those who come with such requests—only the Lord Himself knows their purpose." Yet, so as not to dismiss the man empty-handed, he told him, "Go at once to Lohagaon. There you will find Śivajī Kānsār. Whatever he gives you, take it."

The brāhmaṇa obeyed and hurried to Lohagaon. That day was one of worship in Kānsār's house, and after feeding all guests and giving the customary offerings, Kānsār took four lumps of iron and placed them upon the brāhmaṇa's head, saying, "Take these to Dehu and show them to Tukārām." The poor man, distressed and puzzled as to how these would be of any use, carried them away.

His head grew sore under the burden, and when he reached the twin hills of Kanhere, he left three of the lumps there and carried one to Dehu. Coming before Tukārām, he explained what had happened. When the saint examined the lump, it was found to be pure gold. Smiling, Tukārām said, "This is Jnāndev's gift to you. Tell no one, but use it for the needs of your household."

The brāhmaṇa, filled with joy, departed, but wishing to see if the other lumps were also transformed, he returned to Kanhere. There, where no man ever passed, he found nothing at all—the lumps had vanished. Accepting this as the unfolding of his own destiny, he returned home.

Now I shall narrate another deep and sweet episode—how the saint came to the confluence of the rivers Muḷā and Bhīvrā to bathe at that sacred tīrtha, setting forth from Dehu. As Tukaram Maharaj journeyed along a desolate forest path, he beheld a herd of grazing sheep. In that lonely place there was a fierce dog, known to attack anyone without mercy. If a man

happened to pass that way, the beast would leap upon him, tearing open the throat and drinking his blood. Its savagery had become widely known, and none dared to confront it.

It so happened that Tukaram's way led through that very place. The dog, catching sight of him, charged forward at full speed. Yet the saint felt neither fear nor anxiety. As the animal came close, it made a swift lunge as if to seize him by the throat. At that very moment, the compassionate devotee spoke gently to it: "We bear you no grudge, dear one. Why, then, do you seek to fasten your teeth into this body?"

Hearing these words, the dog at once became calm. It lay down upon the ground in peace, troubling no one. Soon the shepherds arrived and, seeing the fierce beast lying there as meek as a household cat, marvelled greatly that it neither barked nor growled at anyone.

Tukaram, unperturbed, continued his journey, chanting the Lord's Name and weaving garlands with love. Crossing the path swiftly, he came to the banks of the Bhima, where he bathed. Then, on the island near the temple of Śiva, he sat alone, that heroic Vaiṣṇava, and brought to mind the form of Rukmiṇī's Lord, singing with devotion the glories of His manifest deeds.

By midday, Tukaram went to the nearby village of Ranjangaon for alms. At the house of a Brahmin, it was the time of offering food to the deities. The householder, seeing before him a devotee of Viṣṇu, felt great joy in his heart and served him a meal with humility. After the meal, he spoke: "This son of mine is eight years old, yet he has never spoken a word. We have delayed his sacred-thread ceremony, for he cannot utter the syllables of the Gāyatrī mantra."

Bringing the boy before the saint, the Brahmin said, "Kindly bid him say 'Viṭṭhala, Viṭṭhala.'" By the grace of the saint, the child at once began to speak. The Brahmin, overjoyed, postponed Tukaram's departure and, on the following day, performed the boy's thread ceremony. People marvelled, saying, "Behold the wondrous work of the saint! He has made the dumb speak."

When Tukaram resumed his journey, the shepherds told him, "It was because of you that the fierce dog left his work of guarding the flock. Please take him away with you." The saint moved on, and the dog followed faithfully. It observed the ekādaśī fast, never touching food on that day, and would always listen to kīrtana.

One day, his son-in-law, Yelavāḍkar, approached Tukaram and asked, "Please tell me of your daily spiritual discipline." Understanding his earnest intent, Tukaram gave him a copy of the Bhagavad Gītā, instructing him to read it daily as his vow. This greatly pleased the Lord of Paṇḍharpur.

But one day, a local Brahmin from the village came unexpectedly to Yelavāḍkar's home and said, "You are reading the Gītā incorrectly. You will surely go to hell." Malji, the son-in-law,

accepted the Brahmin's words and resolved, "From this day forward, I will not read it at all." Having thus sown doubt, the Brahmin went his way.

That night, Lord Viṭṭhala appeared to the Brahmin in a dream and rebuked him: "What right had you to hinder this reading of the Gītā? It delighted My heart, yet you discouraged it without cause. Now go at once to his house and urge him to resume the recitation, that his welfare may be secured. Unless you do this, you will lose even the power to speak."

Awakening in great fear, the Brahmin went early in the morning to Yelavāḍi and said, "Please continue the daily reading of the Gītā." But Malji replied, "I have resolved not to read it again." The Brahmin then remained there for four months, teaching him to recite it properly.

The Lord of Rukmiṇī, ever hungry for the love of His devotees, delights more in the simple, heartfelt offering of a bhakta than in the fault-finding logic of the learned. Tukaram himself would say, "In His childhood, Śrī Kṛṣṇa once ate clay, causing His face to be soiled. When Yaśodā took Him to task for this, it was but a playful leela."

Hearing these words, Rāmeśvara Bhaṭṭa deliberately altered them while writing, claiming that such sayings should be changed. In a dream, Lord Viṭṭhala appeared to him and said, "You have rejected Tukaram's words to establish your own opinion. Do you think I am concerned if My face appears soiled? Was it not natural for Me to have a dusty face when, in My childhood, I ate clay? The saints speak what they have truly seen in Me, and Tukaram is dear to Me as My own life."

Having shown this vision, the Lord disappeared. Rāmeśvara awoke astonished, his heart filled with wonder at the miracle. Just as Tukaram's spoken words were, so too were his actions — for he never failed to put into practice what he taught. On one such occasion, while seated amidst the assembly of saintly souls engaged in kirtan, he poured forth sacred teachings to all who sat before him.

It so happened that, one year during the month of Chaitra, Tukaram resolved to undertake a pilgrimage. The holy Shambhu's sacred peak had long dwelt in his heart, and with firm intent to behold it, he set forth. In his company were two companions — Gangaji Maval, a pious Brahmin, and Santaji Teli, a devout Vaishnava.

As they journeyed along, they sang bhajans unceasingly, halting at night wherever they found lodging, where the hours would again be filled with kirtan. On the seventh stage of their journey, the lofty peak of Shikhar came into view, and the pilgrims, their hearts swelling with devotion, prostrated themselves upon the earth.

This was the great mountain Koteshwar, abode of Parvati's Lord. At its base lay the sacred town of Singnapur, wherein was a lake of pure waters. The spring upon the mountain had run dry, and thus they performed their ablutions in the waters of the lake.

The companions then said to Tukaram, “Let us now go for the darshan of Lord Shambhu.” But the Vaishnava devotee replied, “First we must offer food to Shambhu, and only afterwards take His darshan. It is not fitting to see Him while He is hungry.”

Understanding Tukaram’s mind, the four of them prepared a meal right there. But as they were so engaged, suddenly there appeared before them, in the guise of a naked Digambara ascetic, none other than the Lord of Kailasa Himself. His matted locks were bound in a lofty crown, His body was smeared with sacred ash, and from His form shone an effulgence that nothing could dim. In His hand He carried a water gourd.

Turning to Tukaram, He spoke: “It is here that you are offering Me food. For many days I have hungered, and I longed for your darshan.” Hearing this, the Vaishnava devotee instantly offered obeisance with heartfelt reverence, inviting Him to be seated.

When the cooking was done, Gangaji set out four vessels. “Let the guest be fed first,” they all agreed, “and afterwards the three of us shall partake.” The meal they had prepared for four was consumed entirely by the ascetic, who, having eaten, belched in satisfaction and uttered words of blessing.

He drank water from a large gourd, cleansed His hands, chewed betel to refresh His mouth, and said to Tukaram, “Your welfare shall indeed be secured.” Thus speaking, the mysterious ascetic departed towards Koteshwar mountain.

Gangaji Maval, filled with wonder, turned to Tukaram and said, “You chose the right course. Otherwise, had the guest remained hungry, we would have had to send Santaji in haste to the village for provisions.”

Indeed, Santaji had gone to the village to gather such materials, covering the cooking pot to keep away flies. But before his return, an astonishing event had occurred — when Gangaji lifted the lid of the pot, he found it brimming with food, perfect in every way.

At once the two companions understood in their hearts that the Lord of Kailasa Himself had come in the guise of an ascetic to dine with them, and that such darshan was possible only in the company of saints. They partook of that prasada together, and then hastened up the mountain to have formal darshan of Lord Shambhu.

In the fullness of their love, they performed kirtan at the great doorway of the temple, singing Tukaram’s abhangas on the Kavadi with heartfelt devotion in many modes. Having thus spent five nights there in worship, they returned to Dehu.

Indeed, Tukaram, though living in a body, was one who had already transcended the body — such was his immeasurable greatness.

On another occasion, a Vaishnava devotee, in the midst of kirtan, sang an abhanga in which he declared: “When one undertakes the journey of life with constant remembrance of the Name, it is as if one is performing a yajna at every step.”

Among the listeners was a devout Brahmin from Lohgaon, who held the words in his heart, certain they were true. He vowed, tying a knot in his sacred thread with his own hands, that he would test the truth of them for one full year.

In those days there was a certain renowned householder who was bound in an inauspicious spiritual entanglement with a Brahmin by marriage. This man went to the shrine of Harihareshwar and served there with special devotion.

One day, the in-law came to him and said, “If you will give me the spiritual merit of one yajna, I will release you from this bond at once.” Hearing this, the Brahmin was deeply troubled, for he had no means to perform such a sacrifice at that moment.

So he travelled from place to place, proclaiming to all he met: “If anyone has performed a yajna, grant me the merit of it immediately.”

Many sacred places of great renown had he visited, yet nowhere did the desired work bear fruit. Wandering thus, he came by chance to Lohgaon. There, it seemed, the merit of a certain sacrifice had accrued to someone, and he resolved that if such merit could be secured at once, it should be taken for the sake of doing good to others in this very hour.

While proceeding on his way chanting the Name, at every step he passed by a sacrificial rite. Many bundles of offerings had been placed there, and hearing of this, he approached the host. Inviting the master of the house, he asked for one bundle, which the man gave. He then washed it in water, offered it, and served the cause for which he had sought it.

The marvellous power of the Name was manifest — the man who had given him the bundle released a person who had been grievously afflicted. That afflicted brāhmaṇa, once freed, suddenly fell unconscious like a corpse and remained thus for three hours. All the people of the village gathered, beholding the wonder with their own eyes, and said, “Tukā’s words have proved true; we have seen them fulfilled before us.” The one whom the host had greatly troubled found relief, and many who saw the miracle were moved in heart.

Such was the state of Tukā — filled with knowledge, renunciation, and a sattvic nature, yet above all, adorned with loving devotion, ever engaging in solitary bhajana. The vow of the Āṣāḍhī and Kārtikī pilgrimages to Paṇḍharpur he never failed to keep. But one day, all of a sudden, a great affliction came upon his body. Chilled with fever, his frame became exceedingly weak. He said to himself, “A great obstacle has arisen for this pilgrimage; what means can I now employ?”

Like a cow that lows piteously for her calf, like a chakora restless without the moonlight, or a chataka longing for the raincloud, his mind constantly yearned for the Lord. Like a fish struggling without water, like an infant wailing without its mother, or a poor man distressed at the loss of all his wealth, such was his sorrow at the thought of being parted from the holy journey to Paṇḍharpur. Even a single step forward on that sacred path filled his heart with longing.

Hearing of Tukā's loving kīrtana, many were drawn into devotion. With fourteen banners they set forth for Paṇḍharpur. The vārikarīs came to Dehu village, eager to have Tukā join them. Then, in twenty-four sweet abhanga verses, he sent them a letter.

When he came forth to see off the pilgrims, his throat choked with emotion as he wrote. "To entreat You, O Viṭhābāī, I have no strength in this body; yet I gather my courage and, in love, take hold of Your feet. Even the great seers of the Purāṇas could not fathom the depth of Your character — how then can a poor one like me speak of it? Whatever angry or gentle words You utter, O Rukmiṇī's Lord, may I accept them upon my head. You are the life of all powerless beings; if I have forgotten You, by what fault of mine has this come about? Why, then, do You turn me away? My mind burns in longing all the while, O compassionate Viṭhābāī.

If You are so reserved in Your heart, why then did You take me as Your own child? The weight belongs to the bearer; why lay it upon another? Like a doe searching the ten directions for her lost fawn, such is my state, O Paṇḍhari-nātha — You know it well. Like the chataka who recognises the raincloud yet is not satisfied until it drinks, such is my sorrow, beyond words to tell. Like the child abandoned by its mother, pitiful in the eyes of all, so am I before You, O Rukmiṇī-ramana. Like the poor man bereft of his treasure, restless day and night, such is my yearning for You, O dark-blue Lord. Like the fish gasping when its life-water is cut off, so am I — and the saints themselves will tell You this.

I cannot lift my foot upon the step before me, so may I fall in prostration at Your feet in this very moment. Or else, like one leaning on a staff suddenly cast to the ground in helplessness, so will I bow at Your lotus feet, O wielder of the discus. Like the child denied its mother's milk, tumbling restlessly upon the earth, so will I prostrate near You, as all the vārikarīs declare.

Tell the saints, my dear companions, to pray to the Lord of Paṇḍharī, saying, 'What injustice has Tukā committed, that You keep him from Your feet?' If Rukmiṇī's Lord will show mercy, I shall come running; meeting the saints and the noble, I shall dance with joy in kīrtana."

Thus writing, weary yet full of love, he bowed to the saints, his throat choked with devotion and his eyes streaming with tears. The Vaiṣṇava heroes saluted one another, raising the Name of Viṭṭhala in joyful chorus, and set forth swiftly on their yātrā. With fourteen banners the pilgrims marched to Paṇḍharpur, though the pang of parting from Tukā made them go less quickly. Tukā, tender of heart, followed them slowly from behind, saying, "Has my Pandurańga Himself grown weary of me?"

Hearing these words, the vārikarīs were moved to tears. They urged him on gently, and at length they reached the sacred kṣetra of Paṇḍharpur. The sound of cymbals, vīṇās, and mṛdaṅgas filled the air with the music of nādabrahma; Viṣṇu's servants danced in kīrtana, steeped in the nectar of love.

When the holy city came into view, their hearts were filled with great content. Greeting one another with joy, the Vaiṣṇavas embraced and then offered ārati to Rukmiṇī's Beloved. Bathing in the Chandra-bhāgā, they then took the blessed darśana of Puṇḍalīka.

With hearts overflowing in divine love, the devotees danced in bliss, circumambulating the entire sacred precinct. Then, hastening towards the great gateway, they prostrated themselves in deep reverence before the Lord. Tukārām Mahārāj had written twenty-four abhaṅgas upon a letter, inscribing them with his own hand. As these verses were sung in kīrtan at the Garuḍa-maṇḍapa, they were first read aloud before the Lord Himself.

The replies Tukārām had earlier received from the Lord were also sung with affection by the valiant Vaiṣṇavas. Hearing them with the ears of devotion, the assembled faithful felt tears stream from their eyes. When the kīrtan was thus concluded, they offered ārati to the Lord of Rukmiṇī and, bowing full-length upon the ground in loving surrender, went to take darśan of Viṭhobā.

Those who had brought the letter from Tukārām were noble souls—Rāmeśvara Bhaṭṭa, the eminent brāhmaṇa who had once taken refuge with Tukārām in a time of injustice; Gaṅgādhara Mawāl of Kadus; the devout Vaiṣṇavas of Santateli; and many more pilgrims whose names could scarcely be all recorded in writing. With the letter in hand, they entered into the sanctum, where upon the brick they beheld the Lord of Rukmiṇī, His lotus-hands resting gracefully upon His hips.

That very Supreme Brahman, now manifest in a saguna form, embraced them tenderly upon seeing them. Bowing low and placing their heads upon His feet, they then lifted their gaze to behold His countenance once more. Placing Tukārām's letter before Him, they conveyed the message at once: that Śrīhari had declared there was no leisure for Tukārām to come to Paṇḍharpur, and thus he had sent only the letter.

The Lord, ever the compassionate friend of His devotees, said: "This letter has been written to Me by you, My eternal witness, the very embodiment of consciousness. Words are scarcely needed between us." Hearing this message, the wielder of the Sudarśana became choked with emotion. Calling Rukmiṇī near, the Lord, the Bestower of Liberation, spoke: "Tukā is My true devotee. Because he has no leisure, he could not come to Paṇḍharpur. Therefore he has written and sent this letter. But now I Myself wish to send for him in person."

When Sārṅgadhara inquired what was to be done, Rukmiṇī answered: "To behold You is the life's fulfilment for the faithful. If they are deprived of the sight of Your manifest form, the devotees will suffer greatly. Therefore, let Garuḍa be sent at once to bring Tukā here." Hearing this, Śrīhari at once commanded the king of birds: "Go swiftly to Dehu. Seat Tukārām upon your back and bring him here to meet Me."

Receiving the Lord's order upon his head, Garuḍa bowed low, and with a single beat of his mighty wings sped through the skies. Within a moment he reached the sacred village of

Dehu. There, outside the settlement, stood Tukārām, the loving Vaiṣṇava saint, having gathered the pilgrims together and sent them ahead. Unaware of his body, he stood awaiting the call of Paṇḍharpur, his mind absorbed in the remembrance of the Lord.

Such was his absorption that his very form seemed transformed into the nature of Brahman. Yet, though immersed in this nondual awareness, Tukā cared nothing for such states—his heart's only treasure was pure love. Like a motionless stump of a tree, his body stood unmoving upon the path. Gazing upon this sight, the Lord of Birds was filled with wonder. Descending gently to the earth, he spoke in sweet tones, placing the Lord's letter into Tukā's hand: "The Lord of Rukmiṇī sorrows in separation from you. Because your body has grown frail, you have not been able to come to Paṇḍharpur. Therefore He has sent Me, by His command, to bring you to Him."

Hearing Vinatā's son speak thus, Tukā was overcome with emotion. As he read the divine letter, listen, O faithful ones, to the message therein: "So long as Vaikuṇṭha and Kailāsa endure, so long shall Tukā live upon this earth. Of all My wealth throughout the worlds, you alone are the rightful possessor. As I cannot endure separation from you, so you cannot bear it from Me. Therefore I have sent Garuḍa to bring you here. Seat yourself upon his back and behold this land of Paṇḍharpur with your own eyes. That sight will bring you the highest joy."

Reading these words, the Vaiṣṇava saint's eyes overflowed with tears. Then he said to Garuḍa: "How could I ever do such an unseemly thing? You are the great vehicle of the Lord; I am but a servant who bears His sandals. If even a golden canopy is not placed upon one's head, how could I seat myself upon your back? Tell the Lord of Paṇḍharpur of my condition and bring Him here instead." Saying thus, the loving Tukā clasped Garuḍa's feet.

Understanding the innermost heart of the true devotee, Garuḍa departed at once and, returning swiftly to Paṇḍharpur, bowed before the Lord. "Tukā will not seat himself upon my back," he reported, "but he stands awaiting You outside the village." Hearing this, the Supreme Lord's voice trembled with devotion, and He turned to Rukmiṇī, saying: "Now We must go to meet Tukā."

When four days had passed, the Vaiṣṇavas had returned to their homes in Gopālapur, their hearts still swaying with the bliss of the festival and the garlands they had offered in love. The great yātrā having concluded, the pilgrims asked the Lord's permission and departed for their own abodes.

Meanwhile, as the days passed, the Wārkarīs from Dehu came again together in a single company. Tukā stood at the head of the path, waiting unceasingly, his hands resting upon his head in readiness. Seeing such steadfastness, the valiant Vaiṣṇavas marvelled, saying: "Such firmness is rare indeed." For though his body had become wholly Brahman through the Lord's own kīrtan, yet Tukā never abandoned his posture of loving devotion. Truly, who else could be such a Vaiṣṇava?

The king prostrated himself before him, humbly beseeching Tuka to take charge of the village and make it his own. Yet Tukaram, ever steadfast in the vow of desirelessness, declined, his mind ever free from any craving for possession. Once, when a lump of iron was placed before his eyes, it instantly turned into gold; yet, if he happened to see even a single flawed bead upon a necklace worn by his wife, he would deem it impure and of no worth, for to him, worldly gold itself was a pollutant.

Wherever his feet happened to fall, the eight mystic perfections would manifest without limit; yet he would never keep at home even a single day's provision of grain. Such was his utter detachment.

Now, when the pilgrims returned from Pandharpur, Tukaram would behold them with great joy, and would throw himself down in full prostration before them. There was a certain brāhmaṇa named Rameshwar, who was counted as belonging to Tukaram's own spiritual fellowship; even to him, the saint—though utterly beyond ego—would prostrate with full respect, without the least thought of his own greatness.

Upon seeing his own disciple, Tukaram would honour him as if beholding the Lord Himself. For indeed, such a one was a true Jagadguru, perfect in knowledge, devoted to the worship of the non-dual Reality. Just as the vast ocean counts the drop of water that reaches it as one with itself, or as dry and fragrant sandalwood and bitter asafoetida are alike to one whose tongue is numb, even so was Tukaram's loving equanimity: he never distinguished between the honourable and the dishonourable.

Those who called themselves his servants, serving him with life and heart, appeared to him as none other than God Himself. Such was his unique devotion and love, beyond all comparison, by which he magnified the glory of bhakti and made even the Supreme Person subject to that love.

When the pilgrims returned, he would prostrate before them, and they would embrace each other in mutual affection. He would gladly partake of the prasāda they brought, saying, "Truly, Śrī Hari is gracious; He has cast me aside to dwell here, while you have come from His presence."

Such was his eagerness, that when the devotees spoke of the happenings in Pandharpur, they would recount the entire tale, saying, "The Lord of Rukmini will come quickly to meet you today." Hearing such tidings, he would knot the folds of his garment as one does to preserve a good omen, and with deep yearning would say, "Come, let us hasten to meet the Lord of the world."

Thus speaking, the heroic Vaiṣṇava placed his hand upon his bare head, stood firm in patience, and with a voice choked in compassion began to call upon the Lord. But the pilgrims, seeing his resolve, entered the village and returned to their homes, entangling themselves again in worldly duties.

When letters were sent to Pandharpur, Tukaram remained still in place, while Vaishnavadas composed nineteen abhaṅgas in the meantime. With all effort he would bring those verses to the saints for contemplation, yet with love he would still keep watch, saying, “Why does the Lord of Rukmini not come?”

“O Lord, upon whose banner Garuḍa is borne,” he prayed, “what worship of some other devotee has so bound Thee that Thou hast forgotten me? Or has some other calamity arisen that has detained Thee, O wielder of the discus? Hast Thou forgotten me in Thy mind and left me alone in this wilderness?”

Thus, in the intensity of his love, Tuka ever remembered the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, until suddenly, high in the heavens, the banner of Garuḍa shone forth—the true friend of His devotee was arriving!

Descending swiftly from the skies, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, mounted upon His bird-vehicle, stood before him. The radiance of His yellow silken robes eclipsed the light of the sun. His youthful form was most beautiful; both His hands shone in their prime, adorned with divine makara-shaped earrings, His face enchanting to behold. Around His neck hung the Kaustubha jewel, the Vaijayantī garland, and the wreath of tulasī; a peacock plume adorned His crown, and to gaze upon Him was to find the soul’s perfect rest.

Accompanied by Rukmini, the bearer of the bow stood before Tukaram. With all four arms the Ocean of Compassion hastened to embrace His servant, pressing him to His heart with the purest love, as the Life of the Universe met His own devotee face to face.

In the next chapter, the nectar of this meeting with the Lord of Rukmini will be described in fullness. May the hearers be blessed with steadfast devotion upon hearing it.

Thus ends the thirty-seventh chapter of the sacred Bhakta Līlāmṛta, sweet as nectar to the loving devotees, the mere hearing of which fulfils the heart’s deepest longing.

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Chapter 38

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Śrī Gaṇeśa)

On the sacred bank of the Bhīmā dwells the Lord, the consort of Rukmiṇī, the embodiment of Sat–Cit–Ānanda, the ocean of compassion. Thy glory is renowned throughout the world; ancient ballads resound with Thy praise. The śrutis and śāstras describe Thy virtues, yet even they cannot comprehend the full measure of Thy greatness. Then, how can I—foolish, ignorant, and of worldly intellect—hope to speak of Thee?

I possess neither cleverness nor skill, nor am I well–learned or deeply versed in scripture. My mind, born of vain imaginings, wavers like the wind, yet even so I have dared to begin this work, that it may reach its conclusion by Thy grace. Supported by Thee, O wielder of the discus, I have taken pen in hand; may Thou ever abide in my heart, granting me constant remembrance of Thee.

As I now speak of the lives of saints, the entire burden rests solely upon Thee. Should my words falter unexpectedly, O Infinite One, do Thou make them whole. When the whirlpool of the threefold afflictions surges before me and countless obstacles arise, do Thou send forth Thy Sudarśana to bring this work to completion without hindrance.

This, O Rukmiṇīpati, is the firm resolve I have taken, yet I place the final accomplishment entirely in Thy hands. Thus does this humble servant entreat Thee, O Lord of the earth. In the previous chapter, I had narrated a delightful tale and, taking my own leisure, completed it. When I then sent the written account to the Lord, the Resident of Paṇḍharī, He was well pleased. Appearing before Tukārām in His manifest, transcendental form, He embraced him closely to His bosom, holding his feet in His own embrace, and filled him with a bliss beyond the measure of the worlds. Thereafter, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha came to Tukā's humble dwelling. It was a small, worn–out hut, shaken by the winds blowing in all ten directions.

The Lord said to Tukā, "O my dear, I am hungry within; I desire a meal that will fill my belly. Prepare the food quickly." At once, Tukā asked his wife Avalī to ready the fare, telling her that the Lord of lords had come to their home and that she should swiftly prepare vegetables and pure food with a clean heart.

Avalī quickly cooked some vegetables and flatbreads, serving them upon a plate. Then Hari Himself sat down to dine. Just as in a sage's sacrifice He refuses the offerings of the proud, so too does He eat, with the highest honor, the simple fare from a true devotee's home. Where He finds fault with ritual offerings in the mouth of the yajna, there He delights in the berries of Śabarī, tasting them with utmost eagerness. He will not go to the feast prepared by Duryodhana, but will seek out Vidura's home to eat Avalī's simple fare without delay.

Such is the bond the Lord forms with His devotees, as all-knowing Vaiṣṇavas well understand. Seeing the pure and desireless devotion of Tukā, He partook of the humble meal

with joy. When He had eaten to His fill, the Lord, the life of the worlds, rinsed His mouth with the leaf of holy tulasī, offering it with His own true love.

Thus, having pleased Tukā, the Lord vanished from sight, yet took His seat as a bee in the full–blossomed lotus of the devotee's heart.

Now, O listeners, hear another tale. There was once a brāhmaṇa, deeply inclined towards the spiritual life, who had with great love studied and written out the sacred book Vivekasindhu. Reading it daily brought him joy. Upon hearing of Tukā's fame, he began to scorn himself within, thinking, "If the Lord dwells within the heart, why should one wander in forests and wilds?"

Thus reasoning, this noble brāhmaṇa reflected further: "From what I have heard in Vivekasindhu, I understand the inner state of Tukā." Then he came to the village of Dehu and saw Tukā upon the bank of the Indrayāṇī, engaged in the remembrance of the Lord's Name along with other Vaiṣṇavas.

When the two met, they bowed to each other. The brāhmaṇa, with sincere humility, spoke: "I am reading the work Vivekasindhu, composed by Śrī Mukundarāja. Will you, out of affection, hear it?" Tukā, ever the loving devotee, agreed to guard and respect the reading. Wrapping himself in a blanket, he covered his whole body, saying to the brāhmaṇa, "I have veiled my eyes from seeing anything, so that you may recite without distraction."

Hearing this, the brāhmaṇa began the reading, explaining the meanings in many ways, but Tukā made no reply. A whole watch of the day passed until the book was finished, yet Tukā neither stirred nor spoke. The brāhmaṇa, wondering what was happening, lifted the blanket and found that Tukā had stopped his ears with his fingers, swaying in the rhythm of the Lord's Name.

The brāhmaṇa, disheartened, thought within himself: "I have travelled far upon this path, read this text for a full watch of the day, yet my labor has been in vain. I had hoped that in your company I might gain understanding and insight, but you have closed your ears and become as one without a body—not even hearing what I have read."

Hearing this, the heroic Vaiṣṇava (Tukā) at once recited an abhanga: "It is for this reason that I have left my home and dwelt apart in the forests—to hold fast to the vow of the Name and Form of the Lord, to keep my vision upon Him with love, and to fix my intellect in desireless devotion until I become one with Brahman itself. Therefore I do not listen at all to discourses on advaita, for they cause distraction to the devotee of God, and such labor should not be undertaken in vain. With their mouths they speak of Self–knowledge, declaring all beings to be of the nature of Brahman; yet for a mere coin they will risk their lives and quarrel in the marketplace. If indeed all appears as Brahman, why then should there be grief over comings and goings? In the realm of the nirguṇa, words have no place at all. By such talk, the path of devotion to God is broken, and the soul falls from its height. The Lord Himself has set limits; within these one should walk. Even if one be firmly established in

Brahman, the supreme Lord's power remains irresistible. Creation, sustenance, and dissolution cannot be accomplished without Him. As long as the three deities remain with their respective guṇas, so long should one, in accordance with the divine order, refrain from speaking words of unqualified advaita."

Thus, as the Vaiṣṇava devotee spoke, realisation dawned upon the brāhmaṇa, and his heart became firmly attached to the worship of the Lord in His manifest, transcendental form. The compassionate words, ancient yet ever-living, that the saint uttered entered his ears with sweetness; he listened with delight, and felt within himself a completeness pervading his whole being.

One day, some eminent householders from Lohu village came swiftly to invite Tukā to their place for the joyous sound of kīrtana. There they prepared many kinds of cooked food to honor the brāhmaṇas, and at night began the kīrtana, intent upon ferrying souls across the ocean of worldly existence.

In that night's course, as dawn approached, they came to a well whose waters were brackish and unused by anyone. There Tukā, arriving suddenly, bathed fully within it; instantly, the water became sweet to the taste. This wondrous miracle endures to this day, and the well is still known in Lohu as the Kānsār Well, its very name preserving the glory of the Lord's devotee and adding to the fame of Paṇḍharī's indwelling Lord.

In that village lived a brāhmaṇa Vaiṣṇava whose heart was deeply attached to Tukā. Hearing the kīrtana, he longed to abandon all worldly entanglements. His wife, though outwardly fair of form, bore secret resentment in her mind, saying, "This Tukā has driven my husband mad; I must see to him sternly."

When her husband had gone to the village, she cooked bitter gourds, and when Tukā was present in the temple, she invited him to partake of a meal. But the tongue of the true Vaiṣṇava, having conquered the senses and fixed firmly upon the Lord, knows neither bitter nor sweet—his state being that of one beyond the body. He ate without complaint, saying even that the dish was sweet, and asked for more.

When Tukā departed after his meal, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha was displeased by her malice. At once, large tumorous swellings appeared all over her body; though remedies of all three kinds were tried, none availed. Thus the fruit of her deed came upon her. Ever hating God brings one to the supreme state if done in love, but hatred towards the Lord's devotees brings only the endless torments of Raurava hell, and never is such calamity escaped.

In Lohu there lived another brāhmaṇa, most devout and steadfast in his vows. Once, because of his observance of the Monday fast, he invited Tukā to dine. He and his wife stood ready, but there was no ghee to complete the meal, for the oil in their lamp had been used up. This caused him deep concern—there was drought in the land, and who would go now to the market?

Seeing this, Tukā spoke gently: “Look into the lamp vessel.” The master of the house did so, and beheld within an abundance of oil. Bringing it forth at once, they prepared the meal in joy. Where there is faith in God’s devotee, all perfections come without lack.

So long as those two remained devoted, the oil never diminished. And now, O faithful listeners, hear another marvel. In the village of Śirāl, Tukā once sat upon the platform before the headman’s house. A man carrying a small earthen water-pot came dancing before him; for a month, this man had gone about the village in this way, collecting goods from each house, and now he came with a load of iron.

Standing before Tukā, he said, “Fill my pot.” Tukā, the heroic Vaiṣṇava, asked, “What have you brought today?” He poured forth pieces of iron onto the stone before them; instantly, they turned to gold. People urged him to fill his pot quickly, but in his heart, content with what he had, he took the gold and departed at once. Those driven by worldly desires marvelled greatly, rubbing their own iron upon the same stone, but it did not change; they said, “This is no Touchstone, but an ordinary rock.”

The fortunate pot-bearer alone obtained wealth, for he had touched the feet of Tukā. That same stone remains there to this day, and when its tale is told, saints and sādhus listen with rapt attention.

On another day, while Tukā was performing kīrtana in Lohu, a great pavilion was erected, festooned with fluttering banners. Hearing of Tukā’s fame, nearly two thousand people gathered, young and old alike, to listen with reverence. Among them was a Joshi, devout and regular in hearing the Lord’s kīrtana; his son had been seized by a grievous illness, struggling for life itself. Leaving his ailing son at home for this reason, the devout brāhmaṇa came to hear the kīrtana. He thought to himself, “What is destined to happen will surely happen,” and sat there in quiet resignation.

But as a watch of the night passed, the messengers of Yama came to take away the boy’s life. His grieving mother lifted the lifeless body and, in her anguish, carried it into the kīrtana assembly. She said to Tukā at that moment, “If you can at once raise him to life, then truly you are a steadfast devotee of Viṣṇu; otherwise, you are but a pretender. My husband’s mind has been drawn to you, bringing harm to our household; as you have spoken such lofty words to him, so now speak to us!”

Her intrusion caused a great disturbance in the holy singing. The minds of all present were unsettled, as if someone had mixed poison into a vessel of consecrated food. Seeing this calamity, Tukā closed his eyes, fixing his mind wholly upon the meditation of Paṇḍuraṅga.

He prayed: “Victory, victory to Thee, O Ancient Lord of all! O lover of Thy devotees, O Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, all-pervading and all-knowing, O resident of Paṇḍharī, Śrī Viṭṭhala! Thou hast been praised in countless ballads, sung by Thy Vaiṣṇava devotees. Make them true here and now; let all behold the proof of Thy reality. A complete distraction has come into this worship—what death could be worse for us than this? Take the Sudarśana in hand, O

Viṭhobā, and remove this obstacle! If Thou dost not come here, then truly I shall not keep my life."

Thus spoke the loving devotee, tears flowing from his eyes. Even as this fervent cry arose, the Lord of Paṇḍharī appeared instantly. Touching Tukā gently, He said, "Why are you so troubled? You possess the nectar of life-restoring power. If you utter it amidst the singing of the Lord's Name, life will return to him at once."

Hearing this assurance from Śrī Hari, Tukā's heart was filled with joy. Opening his eyes, he roused the listeners, saying, "Clap your hands and strike the cymbals, cry aloud the Name of Viṭṭhala with all your might. In this way the greatest obstacles are removed; let there be no doubt in the mind."

Obedient to the saint's command, all the devotees took up the chant. The sound of the Name arose, the very embodiment of the eternal nāda-brahma, manifest before them. Cymbals rang, the mṛdaṅga resounded sweetly, and the Name of Viṭṭhala thundered forth. Clapping their hands and snapping their fingers, the assembly was swept up in a tide of boundless joy.

For a full watch of the night they sang thus, until all bodily awareness faded from Tukā, who stood immersed in the disembodied state. The Lord of Paṇḍharī marvelled, and the listeners were blessed indeed—for before their very eyes, the corpse laid in the midst of the kīrtana was restored to life. The boy arose and sat among the singers, joining in the chant with love.

His mother, who was present, fell at Tukā's feet. The devotees clapped in praise, overjoyed, their minds fixed more firmly than ever upon the remembrance of Hari.

Thus, after this wondrous incident, the night was already two watches gone, when the venerable renunciate Śrīpād entered and sat before the assembly. Tukā, the heroic Vaiṣṇava, was then expounding the glory of the Name and the supremacy of devotion, declaring: "Among all spiritual disciplines, the Name is the essence; the Name is the Supreme, the Parabrahman. When one begins any rite or work, it is first offered to Keśava–Nārāyaṇa. Even if a flaw enters a brāhmaṇa's ritual, it is perfected by the remembrance of Viṣṇu.

"At the time of a marriage, thirty-six signs are examined, yet without remembrance of Lakṣmī's Lord the rite is not complete. In the śrāddha for the ancestors, the food is finally offered to the Lord in the form of Janārdana. Without the Name of Hari, no good act reaches its true goal."

Having said this, the loving devotee called out the Name of Viṭṭhala with a roar. But in the assembly there were two deceitful sannyāsīs, who spoke ill of one another. They said, "The remembrance of the Lord's Name from a śūdra's mouth is not to be approved at all." Speaking thus, the wicked pair rose and left quickly.

They had cast off the external tuft of hair, yet their pride had grown tenfold. Harboring hatred toward a devotee in the mind, they were headed only toward spiritual ruin. At that

time, Dādu Koṇḍadev Mokāsī was in Puṇe. The two sannyāsīs came before him to make their complaint. In that very moment, anger flared, and in a fit of indignation, the ascetics cast down their staffs and water pots upon the ground. They struck their foreheads in agitation, lamenting bitterly, and began to voice their grievances. “This Tukaram is but a man of the Shudra caste,” they said, “yet he has dared to engage in ways contrary to the ordained order. By his bewitching ways, he has led devout souls into delusion, drawing them into the path of constant chanting of the Divine Name. He has exalted the glory of devotion beyond measure, while bringing the path of ritual action into decline. Though born a Shudra, he receives salutations from Brahmins!

You, being the authority in this land, we have come to you at once, for apart from you, who else can be our protector? Summon Tukaram here without delay, and mete out punishment at once. If you refuse to act on our words, then we shall at once renounce our very lives!”

Seeing such vehement demands, Dadu Kondadev, the local governor, replied calmly, “Keep your peace for now. I shall summon Tukaram here without delay. You may engage him in open debate, and whoever is defeated shall receive fitting punishment.” Saying this to the assembled sannyasis, he sent his messengers in haste.

To the Brahmins of Lohgaon, he dispatched a letter along with fifty rupees, writing that a group of ascetics had arrived to bring a matter to light. His servants reached Lohgaon swiftly, gathered all the Brahmins together, and placed the letter in their hands.

When they read its contents, fear arose in their hearts. They wondered anxiously, “What will become of us now?” But when Tukaram learned of the matter, he reassured all the Brahmins, saying, “With the Lord of Pandharpur over our heads, what need is there for fear?”

The Brahmins then urged him, “Prepare the offerings at once, and let us depart together without delay.” All the noble Brahmins spoke in one voice.

Even if those ascetics seek to disgrace him, Tukaram’s fame among the people is immense. Even the king himself bows in reverence to him — this is known to all. And so, with cymbals, drums, and the deep tones of the mridanga, accompanied by singers of abhangas, with banners raised high, Tukaram’s kirtan procession set forth.

People from the villages and all the Brahmins came eagerly to see this spectacle, and when they reached the sacred confluence at Pune, they all alighted. After bathing, each attended to their daily vows, and then they sat respectfully to hear Tukaram’s kirtan.

Devotees from far-off places had also gathered for the pilgrimage, and the crowd swelled until it seemed an army had descended. Drawn by the sweet sound of the kirtan, the villagers too came for darshan, bringing with them offerings of various kinds — bananas, coconuts, dates, basil leaves, and garlands of flowers. Placing them reverently before Tukaram, they bowed in devotion.

Just then, a local official stepped out and gazed into the distance. Seeing an approaching company, he asked his servants, “Whose army is that?” They replied, “These are the people of Lohgaon. Tukaram, the devotee of Vishnu, has arrived at the confluence to sing kirtan, and all the villagers have gone for his darshan.”

Hearing this, Dadu Kondadev was moved in heart. “We too must go at once, with offerings in hand, to behold Tukaram,” he declared. But as he set out, the sannyasis confronted him, saying, “You are our sole protector, in whom we placed all hope. Yet now you go for the darshan of the very man against whom we have come to you! Our hopes are betrayed.”

To this, the official replied, “I will not go for darshan among the people. I will meet Tukaram privately and bring him into the town. If you can defeat him in debate, then you may impose whatever punishment you wish. But if he defeats you, then you must bear the result without resistance. Hold firm in your resolve.”

Having thus spoken, he at once gathered his offerings and, accompanied by leading householders, went to meet Tukaram. The cymbals clashed, the mridangas resounded, and the nectar of love for Vishnu poured forth in the kirtan. The devotees danced with abandon, the joy of which was beyond measure.

As they sang the divine exploits of Lord Hari, their throats choked with emotion, tears streamed from their eyes, and their hearts overflowed. At that very moment, a wondrous thing occurred. From within the gathering appeared a radiant ascetic — naked, clothed only in the directions, his matted locks crowning his head, his form shining with divine light. He bore the aura of a great being. With love, he embraced Tukaram and prostrated himself upon the ground. “My yearning for your darshan is fulfilled. All my desires are now complete,” he said, and then quietly departed by another path.

The people whispered among themselves, “Surely this was a denizen of Kailas!” Some said, “It was Dattatreya himself!” — though none could be certain. Even the sannyasis present were struck dumb and could ask nothing. Seeing this wonder, the hearts of all overflowed, and they said, “Blessed is Tukaram, the loving devotee, whose helper is the very Lord of Vaikuntha!”

With loving cries of “Vithoba!” they then performed the auspicious arati, and distributed prasada of dates, bananas, sugar, and other sweets. “Today is a blessed day,” they declared, “for all have found deliverance.”

At length, Dadu Kondadev approached Tukaram humbly, saying, “Now, please come into the town and bless my dwelling with your presence.” Seeing his heartfelt request, Tukaram agreed. But in the minds of the sannyasis there was silent anxiety — for they had intended to disgrace him, yet his fame had only grown.

Still, Tukaram was brought into the city and given a fine residence. The Brahmins of Lohgaon arrived with the prepared offerings and were received with great honor. The merchants of

the town contributed generously, and that day two thousand Brahmins dined in Tukaram's company.

In the third watch of the day, the kirtan commenced once more. Dadu Kondadev turned to the sannyasis and said, "Now let the debate with Tukaram begin. Whichever of you two prevails, I shall honor with the seat of victory." Without hesitation the sannyasis agreed, confident they would win.

They also summoned other contentious and deceitful scholars, men so quarrelsome they would run at the mere cawing of a crow, and who, upon hearing the barking of dogs, would bark back more fiercely. They were likened to the allies of Ravana, like Kumbhakarna, or to Shakuni and Shishupala, companions of Duryodhana — men united in their enmity toward Vishnu. Such was the company the sannyasis had gathered as their allies in debate.

In those days, it was the common understanding that all should come and sit together in the kīrtana. Tukā, however, harbored no enmity towards anyone; rather, he saluted all without distinction. Those who sat before the speaker, as if in the presence of the Lord's own feet, did so with dignity. It is well known that enmity towards a devotee of Viṣṇu robs one of the store of merit already earned.

Then Tukā, with a resounding voice, cried out the name of Viṭṭhala and began the kīrtana, calling upon all to be mindful and to worship the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha. He urged the gathering to remember that moments, hours, and days are being devoured by mighty Time, just as a cat devours a mouse when it ventures from its hole. He likened this world to the scene where one observes the vow of Ekādaśī but places sweet potatoes on the fire, and before the food is even cooked, Time—the devourer—overtakes the body.

Or, as a fish might idly remain in the shallows while a crane stands in meditation nearby, never knowing when the predator will strike—so is the soul that lives without vigilance. All things in creation that seem stable and pleasing are, in truth, destined for dissolution. To be freed from this fate, one must take refuge in Śrī Hari. Without devotion to Him, there is no escape from the cycle of birth and death, no matter what other practices are performed. Various disciplines may be undertaken, yet without His grace, rebirth will not cease.

Whether one's devotion is motivated by desire or free from it, if the holy name of Śrī Hari is chanted with the tongue, Yama, the lord of death, cannot trouble such a one, for the Supreme Person Himself becomes their protector. Thus it was with Ajāmila, the brāhmaṇa's son, who, having fallen into sin through attachment to a harlot, amassed a mountain of worldly transgressions. His touch was so impure that even great tīrthas would shudder, and the seven hells themselves feared to receive him. Yet through the counsel of a holy sage, who told him to name his son Nārāyaṇa, his salvation was secured. At the end of his life, calling to his child, he unwittingly called the Lord, and the Compassionate One of Vaikuṇṭha sent His divine chariot to grant Ajāmila liberation and union with Himself.

Similarly, when the sage Śuka called to Rāma, or when the courtesan was uplifted to Vaikuṇṭha, or when the elephant Gajendra cried in distress and the Lord came to rescue him, or when even a frog cast into a boiling cauldron remembered Kṛṣṇa and felt no scalding pain—these all bear witness to the Lord's saving power. In that last case, a disembodied voice declared, "Take the little frog out," and immediately the divine chariot of Viṣṇu appeared, granting it a celestial body and a place in Vaikuṇṭha forever.

In this iron age of Kali, which is hard to overcome, the name of Śrī Hari alone is the deliverer. Without it, no practice, however exalted, will suffice. So said the loving devotee, and at intervals he laughed aloud, thundering out the name of Viṭṭhala, the gathered listeners joining in the mighty chorus. The clapping of hands and snapping of fingers resounded with the joy of Brahman-realisation, and all sense of duality vanished; Govinda was seen everywhere.

As the bliss of the kīrtana was unfolding, a wondrous event took place. A certain sannyāsin rose and, before all, offered full prostration to Tukā. Dādu Koṇḍadeva, seeing this, reproved him, saying, "Swāmī, how can you act thus? To bow before Tukā is to dishonor the word of the brāhmaṇas. And how can you even touch his feet? If you persist, I will take action."

The sannyāsin replied, "I have seen with my own eyes the radiance of Tukā's form as none other than Nārāyaṇa Himself, a four-armed vision in truth. In love, I bowed to Him." But Moḳāsīs grew angry within and accused the sannyāsin of deceit, forcing him into indignity by seating him upon rough poles and having him paraded through the town with five pat boards on his head. Tukā, seeing this injustice, withdrew, saying, "One should not mock the garb of renunciation in vain; the Lord of Paṇḍharī does not approve."

Thus did Tukā's word cause Moḳāsīs to desist.

On another occasion, while Dādu Koṇḍadeva was entertaining guests, his wife had stepped outside. Near at hand was a dish of salted greens, which Dādu took up himself. When his wife returned, she rebuked him, saying, "How could you touch this when I have the charge here? You preach propriety to others, yet you act contrary yourself." Summoning a guard, she ordered that his hand be cut off for such a breach. Learned brāhmaṇas, however, determined by śāstric authority that in such a case the hand should only be shortened, not severed entirely, and so it was done.

So strict was justice in those days that even when a servant-girl was accused of theft—though she denied it—she was impaled when a measure of grain was found in her possession. Yet, despite this severity, false dealings were despised, and it was in this climate that certain incidents befell Tukā's circle. The saint himself, however, never allowed these worldly entanglements to diminish the joy of kīrtana.

And so, with cries of victory, the Vaiṣṇava devotees roared in praise. The āratī lamps were lit in haste and waved before the beloved consort of Rukmiṇī. As they danced, the name of Viṭṭhala echoed aloud, anklets rang sweetly upon their feet, and the sound swelled to the heavens. Tukā, looking upon the gathered listeners, saw everywhere the very form of

Viṭṭhala; the play of difference and non-difference was stilled, and Śrī Hari appeared in all the world.

In that state beyond bodily consciousness, Tukā brought into his meditation the transcendental form of the Lord, and with loving devotion he performed full prostration. Then he distributed the consecrated sweets. Kings themselves bowed to touch the dust from the saints' feet, and even the crumbs that fell to the ground were gathered in love as precious.

Thus concludes this sweet thirty-eighth chapter of the nectar of the Lord's devotees' deeds, which fulfills all desires merely by hearing, and which flows from the loving speech of saints and devotees.

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Chapter 39

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Śrī Gaṇeśa)

O infinite Pāṇḍuranga, the soul of all beings, You descended into this world to liberate us from the ocean of birth and death. Though I remained alone, lost among all, You have upheld and sustained me. I have observed the rites of purification—the daily bath, the evening prayers, the offerings to my ancestors, and the disciplines of chanting and austerities. I have worshiped You according to all proper observances, yet worldly circumstances did not always unfold favorably.

Neither elaborate rituals nor grand sacrifices have always borne fruit, and my body has grown weary. Pilgrimages could not always be undertaken, yet You, O Viṭṭhala, know all, for I have never forgotten You. Even if I have given gifts to the worthy and charitable, my wealth has never been abundant, for I am devoid of true virtue and my understanding is clouded. Service to the Sadguru, devotion to saints—these I have attempted, yet little success has come from them. In every way, I have stumbled, yet You, Keshava, have always known my heart.

All my faults and misdeeds have accumulated, yet I have fashioned from them a statue of devotion, offering it to You. Though I have indulged in countless worldly pleasures, I now present myself wholly at Your feet. My heart bears witness that even the fallen, if filled with devotion, may be made complete. Now, seeing the garland of Your grace, my mind longs to cross the ocean of worldly existence with Śrī Hari as my guide.

In past chapters, the stories of Narayana have been recounted to Tukaram, and the two ascetics, filled with sacred intent, respectfully bowed. Time passed, and Shivaji's officers sent word to the noble king. Soon, the king, moved by piety, came to receive the vision of Tukaram.

He watched as the king performed worship in various ways. When the time for kīrtana arrived, the devotees joined in, lost in divine emotion. The rhythmic beats of the tāl and the mṛdaṅga resounded; behind them, fifty voices sang the glorious dhruvapad. Chanting the holy name of Viṭṭhala, the sound seemed to weave into the very sky.

During the festival of Hari, Nṛpananda listened attentively, observing the devotion of Tukaram, noting the expressions of love and the earnestness of his words. Though the king was unaware, the story reached him, and he sent a thousand soldiers to witness this devotion firsthand.

The expansive palace of Puna was filled with the sound of Hari kīrtana. Nṛpananda sat, enraptured, while the king's chariot wheels creaked ominously, yet the assembly was undisturbed. When the king sought permission to approach Tukaram, the people thronged, their hearts overwhelmed with wonder.

Knowing the risks, Tukaram entrusted himself entirely to Viṭṭhala, and four abhangas were recited so the virtuous could grasp their meaning. He shared with God the depth of his devotion, declaring fearlessly that he did not fear death, and that the sufferings of others would not darken his vision.

Even if distraction arose during worship, who could take his life, for Viṭṭhala's grace would smooth all obstacles. Hearing this, the compassionate Lord assured Tukaram that kīrtana would bring joy and that he, the sustainer of the world, would protect him.

Outside, Avinḍha, mad with anger, failed to recognize Shivaji, and even the assembly desired to punish the speaker, yet the king remained unharmed. Through this, the Lord's grace diminished all worldly obstacles, guiding even the king toward spiritual insight.

Avinḍha's men sought to seize the king but could not recognize him, and Tukaram's insight revealed the true claimant. As the soldiers rose to act, all fled at the Lord's glance, for even a single glance can overturn the mightiest of foes.

Tukaram proceeded calmly, gathering offerings, and the king, receiving prasad in his hand, was satisfied. The treasures were placed with care, and all were content, witnessing the workings of divine providence.

Thus, Tukaram journeyed through Lohagaon, accompanied by a multitude, with the childlike devotion of Kondoba at his side. The singing of dhruvapad brought profound delight to the saints and devotees alike. Tukaram declared his intention to undertake the great pilgrimage, requesting support from the householder, and all agreed wholeheartedly, offering both wealth and devotion.

The Brahmin, amazed at the marvels unfolding, observed as Tukaram prepared the offerings: flour, jaggery, and ghee were mixed in precise proportions to satisfy the tongue with sweetness. The devotees, witnessing this, were awestruck by the miracle, for each step was guided by divine will.

Three abhangas were sent with a letter, conveying the essence of devotion. It requested, in the sacred name of Vishnu, the fulfillment of divine intention. The cosmos, vast and wondrous, revealed itself in the form of Mahadeva, and the letter, addressed to Vishvanatha, bore the blessing of devotion.

O compassionate Lord, look upon the destitute, the poor, and the orphaned with mercy, for this is the opportunity for Your grace. Repeatedly, let me bow at Your feet, and with my head humbly prostrated, I surrender myself entirely to You.

My mind, content with so little, cannot even fathom what remains with You. Though my heart desires the simplest sustenance, Tukaram, in his devotion, sends it forth in the spirit of surrender.

Now, having written to the river goddess Bhāgīrathī, he expresses his humble request: may she, the sovereign of all sacred waters, be ever in his grasp, so that through her he may attain spiritual merit.

Through her vision alone, all sins may be absolved; thus he bows to her lotus feet with the deepest devotion. By immersing in her waters with a heart filled with sincerity, one attains both worldly sustenance and ultimate liberation. Tukaram declares that nurturing the saints with loving devotion is the highest service, inspiring the bravery and love of all Vaishnavas.

Great King Vishṇupad, impressed by this devotion, humbly receives Tukaram's offering, placing it at his feet with his own hand. Tukaram's debts, both ancestral and karmic, are resolved; the burdens of his past deeds are lifted, and he experiences relief and peace.

Seeing even a single utterance of the holy name of Hari in the hearts of people, Tukaram is moved to compose three abhangas, whose joy and spiritual strength he himself has felt. Kondoba, taking these offerings in his hands, bows in love, and Tukaram, ready for the great pilgrimage, sets out without delay.

Along the way, he distributes coins to those in need, spending freely, and the people marvel at the generosity. Though it may seem that he lacks wealth, he continues, for even if a well were empty, life itself would not be lost. In such steadfastness, Kondoba's devotion mirrors this unyielding commitment, silent to all but fully aware in spirit.

Thus, in orderly fashion, Tukaram travels to Vārāṇasī. There, after bathing in the sacred Bhāgīrathī, he offers farewell to the river goddess with heartfelt devotion. The goddess, delighted, receives his letter, and in wonder, the people marvel at the marvels that unfold.

From the great vessel, Bhāgīrathī emerges, adorned in jewels as if from the womb of the cosmos. The pilgrimage progresses, astonishing all who witness it. She personally attends the bath, honoring Tukaram's devotion. Holding a symbolic seal in her hand, she bestows blessings, and even the broken garments of devotees are transformed into tokens of auspicious fortune.

Through this devoted worship, the universe itself is honored, while Kondbhata's mind remains fixed in remembrance, undistracted. Tukaram, holding his letter, enters the waters, and Bhāgīrathī, seeing him, instantly clasps her hand in blessing. In awe, the people witness the miracle, and Tukaram's eloquence of speech delights her, as he preserves her essence in the heart of Rukmini.

For four months, Kondbhata resides in Kashi with devotion, reciting Tukaram's abhangas and presenting them to Vishvanatha. At the sound of these jewel-like words, flower petals fall as the people watch in wonder. Bhāgīrathī and Vishvanatha together reveal the divine marvels, inspiring pilgrims and filling all hearts with reverence.

Returning from the pilgrimage, Tukaram ensures that all wealth and gifts are distributed among the worthy, sustaining the merit of the journey. The devotees are overjoyed, and

Tukaram, having attained the supreme siddhi, brings the blessings of medicinal herbs and celestial nectar to the people.

Whether the devotees sought water for thirst or milk for sustenance, all needs were met. Even the harshest winters and the fiercest mountains could not hinder the grace of these divine encounters. Lamps illuminate the night, revealing the sun-like brilliance of the unseen, while visions of the divine appear in dreams, and the living presence of Śrīdhara is felt.

The great pilgrimage is thus fulfilled, wealth is wisely employed, and supreme siddhi is granted through sincere devotion. Tukaram, returning with gifts, never withholds his charity, offering all in service of the divine. Outside the village, in the solitude of Lohagaon, he sits in quiet devotion, Kondoba at his side, witnessing the journey's completion.

All offerings are received with devotion; the pilgrimage is concluded with profound remembrance. Kondbhata, astonished, witnesses the miracles firsthand. The saints, too, are moved, as the river goddess herself manifests. Tukaram bathes for two prahars, and the sacred vessels are arranged for the ritual offerings.

Even if one wished to question him, Tukaram humbly deflects, acknowledging the grace that has unfolded. Deceptive desires have not taken root; worldly attachment has not clouded his mind. Failures and obstacles arose, yet through them, his devotion remained steadfast.

Through fire and purification, through milk, forest solitude, and ascetic discipline, Tukaram has purified body and soul. He has observed nature, studied the Vedas, earned his household livelihood righteously, debated knowledgeably, and served as a wise and devout disciple.

He has mastered the ways of devotion, renunciation, and service, walking among sadhus, fakirs, and sages of various paths, yet never losing the clarity of his own mind. Tukaram's heart is free from attachment to worldly wealth; he neither builds palaces nor seeks adornments.

He maintains simplicity of diet, constantly remembers Hari, sings kīrtana day and night, and remains steadfast in devotion. The bonds of worldly life are cut, and fourteen devoted Vaishnavas accompany him, singing the sacred dhruvapad. Tukaram's association sanctifies all, and every act of pilgrimage is filled with joy, devotion, and divine grace.

All siddhis and spiritual powers are at his command, yet he remains humble, ever devoted to Rukmini's beloved. Even when kings act unjustly, Tukaram maintains equanimity. He neither constructs grand houses nor adorns himself in luxury. Eating sparingly, chanting constantly, day and night performing kīrtana, he severs the attachments of worldly life.

Thus, Tukaram's journey, guided by supreme devotion, sanctifies the land and uplifts all who witness his unwavering faith.

Tukaram did not inquire or question; he arose and moved through the village, and soon the people gathered behind him, drawn by his purpose. Though some Vaishnavas asked where

he was headed, he answered that he was going to Vaikunthapura, having set forth like a flowing stream, unhesitant and determined. Even when others asked questions, he remained silent, lost in the continuous remembrance of the divine name, until his body itself seemed to become suffused with Brahman.

One day, a devoted Vaishnava performed kīrtan in the village of Lohagaon, his mind entirely absorbed in the form of the divine name, forgetting all sense of his own bodily existence. The resounding sounds of the cymbals and drums filled the air with the very music of Brahman, as the proclamation of Vithoba's name spread and enveloped the heavens. Observing the state of the speaker, the listeners themselves became enraptured, as if the body were completely absent, their hearts fully immersed in devotion.

With gestures calm and meditative, unmoved by worldly fire, they displayed a wonder that the wise and devoted could only marvel at. Tukaram's very being shone with a luminous radiance, a vision that inspired awe and delight in all who witnessed it. Even in the womb, the divine light manifested within, so intense that it could not remain concealed, spilling forth in expression, yet it was not a lamp kept within a temple; its brilliance radiated naturally, beyond any enclosure.

Just so, within Tukaram's heart, a symbolic Garudadhvaja, the eagle-banner of devotion, rested with serenity, and its radiance flowed outward. The treasures of the poet-saint, the gems of sacred poetry, were stored within his heart like the sun and the crown of Vishnu, preserved by this compassionate devotee. His bodily radiance and the kīrtans he sang revealed a visible manifestation of spiritual experience, a rare fortune for those who witnessed it.

Thus, for the salvation of the world, the devotee became an instrument of divine incarnation. Kīrtan continued for three prahars, after which he turned his attention lovingly toward Rukmini. Below him, the devoted Vaishnavas were enveloped in darkness, yet his body remained a channel for divine presence. As the people came closer, he distributed oil and sanctified it in vessels, filling them without restraint, astonishing all who watched.

The devotees of Lohagaon experienced great joy in serving him, receiving his love and devotion fully. The sound of kīrtan echoed through the air, as the divine play of Krishna in Mathura and Gokul—the lilas of Vraja—were vividly present in their hearts. Tukaram's fame as a renowned Vaishnava grew, yet he spoke to no one, letting his devotion manifest in silence.

Rising to offer homage, he beheld the deity of Pānduranga in vision and prostrated himself, his devotion so intense it seemed as if a staff had struck his very neck. The vision he had imprinted in his heart appeared outwardly, overflowing with love that could no longer be contained. Addressing the deity with a voice full of compassion, he surrendered himself entirely, knowing that this vision fulfilled his deepest desires.

Tukaram's body, though subject to time and mortality, remained a vessel of devotion. One day he traveled to Alandi, entering the assembly with reverence and bowing before the deity. Even the birds, perched upon trees and flitting about, seemed to witness his sanctity, and Tukaram's heart trembled with a divine ecstasy at the sight of their presence.

He conquered his inner enemies, mastering all six inner foes, and the courage of the Vaishnavas became evident. The body itself seemed to lose all sense of its separate existence, as if he were already beyond worldly identity. With the flame of detachment, he purified his body, severing the bonds of worldly attachment. The temple of his body, sacred and disciplined, was offered wholly to Vithoba, extinguishing all desire.

Even the smallest offering, a handful of sesame seeds, became a sacred act. His life was measured not by time but by the illumination of divine protection, as if the lamp within his body glowed with the light of Pāndurang himself. Though birds flew about, Tukaram's heart remained fixed in meditation, and words of lament or distraction were of no effect.

He concentrated his mind, placing Pandharinath firmly in his heart, appealing to the compassionate Lord as the protector of the helpless. With steady hands and unwavering devotion, he guided the blind, who could see nothing, safely along the spiritual path. Tukaram instructed the seekers in the highest truth, and wherever the feet fell, the Lord's grace sustained him.

Standing quietly, completely composed, he moved not a limb unnecessarily, so that the birds might rest upon his arms without fear. This steadfastness brought contentment, for without it, life itself seemed empty. Tukaram resolved to stand firm for four ghaṭikās without even a breath, knowing that the universal soul dwelt within him.

Witnessing Tukaram's unwavering resolve, Pandharinath seemed to accept him fully, enabling the devotee to fulfill the needs of others. Tukaram assured the devotee that divine support would never fail, even if words alone seemed insufficient. The soul, vast and pervading all creation, became the seat of compassion within his heart, allowing the birds to rest in fearless serenity.

Even as he moved, the birds did not flee; as the branches swayed, they remained unafraid. Tukaram, the great sage, composed a single abhang with love, inscribing its first verse and preserving it in his manuscripts for posterity.

All previous doubts and anxieties were dispelled, and never before had he experienced such direct support from the divine mother, akin to the care a mother provides to her child. The compassion of the Lord ensured that Tukaram's heart and all his deeds were aligned with the divine will, guiding him in perfect harmony with the eternal path.

With deep reverence, Tukaram performed a full prostration, bowing at the feet of the divine Jnāndeva, his heart overflowing with love and joy. His gaze, lion-like in its intensity, reflected the vivid memory of past stories and teachings, though he asked no questions and adorned

himself with devotion without concern for appearances. Fourteen devoted Vaishnavas had followed Tukaram, seeking him through the village, and when they arrived, they witnessed wonders beyond imagination.

Seated alone beneath a tree, Tukaram became divine personality, a perch for birds who alighted upon his arms and shoulders repeatedly during that sacred time. Observing this marvel, the gathered people drew near, and when the birds finally flew away, they rejoiced, grateful for the auspicious occasion. At this blessed place, the holy land of Alankāpuri, Tukaram offered kīrtan at the doorway of Jnāndeva's abode.

Accompanied by cymbals and instruments, the devotees joined in, and the resonant music, suffused with Brahman, delighted the ears of all who listened. Singing the names of Krishna, Vishnu, Meghashyama, Achyuta, Narahari, and Purushottama, the devotees experienced love and devotion beyond measure. Tukaram continued this kīrtan until the final moments of his earthly life, sustaining his spiritual practice even as his body weakened, for it is the divine name that nourishes the soul, extinguishing the restlessness of the mind.

Traveling through the three worlds, he sang the holy name like Narada Muni, carrying a veena or a khanda with devotion in his heart. The abhangas of Hari recited by Jnāndeva were echoed by Tukaram with love and respect. The clapping of cymbals and the thumping of drums blended perfectly, creating a divine harmony without any discord. In this blissful sound, Brahman itself seemed to permeate the heavens, and the celestial beings descended with joy to witness the wonder.

Tukaram, in secret form, showered flowers like Vrindaraja, giving the impression of one universe suffused with love, delighting all who heard. Observing his state, the poet felt humbled, for Tukaram's devotion remained unperturbed, spanning through the four prahars of night, and he turned his attention lovingly toward Rukmini. On the twelfth day, after completing the rituals, he traveled to the village of Dehu, where Jnāndeva's presence was invoked, and all beings were free from enmity. Birds alighted fearlessly on his body, exemplifying the extraordinary peace and sanctity that pervaded his being.

Through the testimony of many, the people of Chinchwad learned of this marvel, wishing to witness it with their own eyes. With humility, they invited Tukaram to appear, ensuring that none would miss the divine spectacle. Devotees were sent from the Dehu region with love to bring him, and Tukaram, in his meekness, consented to be taken there. Upon arrival, he offered kīrtan to the assembled Vaishnavas, who rested their hearts in the peace of listening, day and night, fully absorbed in devotion.

For three days they remained, listening without distraction, while Tukaram, with deep awareness of the divine, moved among them. Even as he proceeded, he maintained his inward focus, knowing that the path of devotion transcends all external concern. Along the way, he met and embraced the devoted, bringing their hearts satisfaction and delight. That day was indeed blessed, for the devotees beheld him and experienced the joy of divine sight.

Resting peacefully, he allowed the birds to perch upon him without fear, their wings brushing against him as he remained unmoved. Even as straw was swept away, the birds remained unafraid, an extraordinary testament to the serenity and sanctity of the moment. Though he appeared as a human, the reality of his devotion was beyond all comparison, a manifestation of pure love and surrender to Purushottama. Tukaram's identity, thus, became evident as one immersed fully in divine experience, dispelling all doubt.

As devotees inquired, the Lord revealed wonders: the covering of the forehead was pierced, yet only cotton was seen, without bone, flesh, or blood. Witnessing this, the people were amazed, realizing that such acts were beyond ordinary human capacity. This was the divine incarnation for the upliftment of the world, appearing in human form to teach devotion and love. Tukaram, in profound humility, performed full prostration to the goddess, touching her feet, insisting that any improper act would be unworthy of the Lord's presence.

Though of lowly birth, Tukaram considered himself the servant of all saints. In devotion, he approached the feet of the divine mother like Yashoda to Krishna, recognizing the child within as supreme. He even pierced the skin in his hands to reveal the cotton beneath, showing his respect and submission, as the saint and deity were never separate. The wind and its movement, the sun and its rays, the ocean and its waves—all were one in his devotion; none was distinct, none divided.

Thus, he praised the Lord, who accepted Tukaram into His hands. The devotees of Chinchwad heard the kīrtan with their hearts, experiencing divine love. Through four prahars of continuous kīrtan, he delighted the learned and the faithful. When the sun rose, he turned lovingly toward Rukmini, and in this manner, devotion and divine experience merged, as Tukaram spent three nights listening to the holy stories, offering various meals, and performing acts of love and service with the devotees.

Tukaram adorned the offerings with flowers, betel leaves, and garlands, honoring the devotees of Vishnu with utmost love. At the Dehu temple, he was seen by the Vaishnavas, demonstrating divine plays and incarnations in the most subtle and loving ways. Singing with devotion, he merged his being with the divine, sharing the fruits of his devotion with all.

The Lord is one alone, and there is no need for offering separate arati; the devotee should receive the fruit of service and devotion alone. When observing purity like a clear mirror, no secondary sight is needed; the fragrance of flowers is meaningless without devotion. Likewise, the devotee alone comprehends the majesty of the divine. Tukaram himself, aware of this, divided his devotion into two parts and offered it entirely to the Lord, knowing that nothing in the world could rival this sacred experience.

The fourth level of devotion, leading to liberation, was revealed by Śrī Bhāgavatī herself. She declared that this state must be manifested clearly, and thus, Tukārāma descended upon the earth. He performed kīrtan with such fervor and devotion that even the Kali Yuga, harsh and

relentless, was subdued. Through this divine practice, his body became immortal, wholly transformed into the form of Brahman itself.

Countless noble souls appeared upon the earth, yet their bodies remained in the material realm. Tukā, however, became Brahman incarnate within the human frame—a profound mystery beyond comprehension. In the subsequent chapters, the story of the supreme compassionate one, the savior of the world, is narrated. He came to Tukā, lifting him from worldly bondage, and would ultimately lead him to Vaikuṇṭha, his true abode.

It was he—Achyutananda, the blissful joy of the Lord, the embodiment of līlā and sattvic consciousness—who granted fearlessness to the world's king and narrated the tales of the devotees freely, with complete independence and love. The sacred work, Śrī Bhakta Līlāmṛta, fulfills every desire for hearing and devotion. For the loving and devoted saintly soul, this forty-first chapter is especially sweet, overflowing with the nectar of divine devotion.

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Chapter 40

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Śrī Gaṇeśa)

Even if one were to gather all the waters of the parched rivers, they would be insufficient to cleanse or illuminate the lives of those devoted to the Divine. The sacred deeds and illustrious stories of such devotees are so profound that no mortal can fully comprehend their end. Just as the innumerable blades of grass on earth cannot be counted, so too are the attributes of the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha beyond the grasp of ordinary minds.

Even if one were to read day and night, one would scarcely plumb the depth of the glory of the ocean of divine fame. The splendors of the Lord's miraculous deeds, His wondrous pastimes, and the marvels He performs in the world are impossible to capture fully in mere words. Yet, in His mercy, He allows glimpses of these mysteries, though the human tongue grows hesitant in describing them.

Countless plants and trees exist on earth, yet even if one attempted to enumerate the leaves, one could not encompass the extent of the Lord's glory. The greatness of His deeds in Vaikuṇṭha cannot be fully comprehended by human intellect. Even the most illustrious poets, who strive to describe His virtues, find their efforts inadequate, for the majesty of the Lord transcends all expression.

Śrī Hari, in His compassion, accepts even the simplest words of devotion offered by His devotees. He touches their hearts with love, inspiring waves of affection and devotion in those who listen. It was thus that the Lord graced Tukārām with a vision of His own form, bestowing upon him love and devotion beyond the afflictions of the age of Kali, revealing Himself in His Brahma-like form.

The Lord, wishing to uplift the world, sent a devoted friend to the mortal realm, ensuring that the devotee would experience divine bliss. In the earlier chapters, Tukārām's travels to Alankāpūr were narrated, where birds perched upon his shoulders, witnesses to the miraculous events unfolding around him. At Chinchavadi, the local deity responded swiftly to Tukārām's call, and the faithful were instructed with miraculous signs, yet the physical evidence remained hidden from common view.

Tukārām, astonished, perceived the dissolution of the five elements, yet the vision before his eyes appeared unchanged. Though doubts arose in his mind, the Lord, in His grace, dispelled them and imparted eternal truths through an abhanga—a sacred hymn that Tukārām recorded.

He described the cosmic play, where even a speck of dust is held in the vast expanse of the sky. He spoke of how the cycles of worldly existence are consumed in the fire of maya, and yet the flame of devotion illumines the hearts of the faithful. Tukārām humbly acknowledged

that his efforts were but a drop in the ocean of divine grace, yet even such drops were cherished by the Lord.

Generations of virtuous beings have secured their merit through devotion, and thus Tukārām himself received direct darśan of the Lord. In his hymns, he glorified the Lord with profound reverence, extending obeisances to all devotees. Night after night, he returned to his village, carrying the divine presence within him, ever mindful of the welfare of others.

Śrī Hari, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, contemplated the well-being of His devotee. Observing Tukārām's circumstances, He arranged that the world's distractions—wealth, possessions, and attachments—would be set aside, allowing the devotee to remain undisturbed in the path of devotion. Through divine arrangement, Tukārām's kīrtans echoed day and night, guiding hearts towards devotion and detachment from worldly vanities.

The Lord, in His mercy, orchestrated events so that even when wealth and property were seized by others, the devotee's mind remained detached, ever anchored in divine love. Tukārām's unwavering service and spiritual resolve ensured that the true treasures of life—the love and grace of the Lord—were firmly established within him.

As he traveled from village to village, the faithful were drawn to his kīrtans, hearing them with rapt attention. Processions of devotees played drums, cymbals, and other instruments, while hymns resounded through towns, their hearts alight with devotion. Each day brought fresh hymns, each recitation an offering of love to the Lord.

Meanwhile, Śrī Hari, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha and consort of Lakṣmī, resolved that Tukārām should be brought swiftly from the mortal realm to the divine abode, safeguarding his pure devotion. The celestial powers, led by Indra, arranged for the transport of Tukārām's divine form, ensuring that he reached the Lord's presence without hindrance.

As the great ocean of creation witnessed, Tukārām's heart remained steadfastly devoted to the Lord. Even the distractions and hardships of the material world could not sway his love. His devotion, born of deep attachment to the Lord's form, led him to be sent to the hermitage of Badrikāśram, and eventually, to his eternal dwelling, where he continued to uphold the dharmic order, the practice of sacrifices, and the sacred teachings of the Bhāgavata.

Thus, Tukārām's life serves as a luminous example: that the devoted heart, guided by divine grace, remains untouched by worldly delusions, secure in the love of God, steadfast in service, and ever immersed in the eternal sound of His glory. Through him, the Lord revealed that the treasures of the world are transient, but the wealth of devotion, once earned, is imperishable and eternal.

Then we conveyed our command to Uddhava, urging him to take birth upon this earth. "You must incarnate," we said, "so that My sacred fame may spread among the villages, and the redemption of the world may be fulfilled." At that moment, he spoke from the depths of his

own heart, weary of dwelling in the womb: “I shall not go to the realm of the dead, nor scatter myself in Vaikuntha; I must descend in the mortal world.”

Understanding the sacred design, the Divine entrusted him to the life of the world, placing him in the womb in a manner beyond ordinary birth, and Bhimarathi, with loving care, delivered him. In Pandharpur, Damashree the washerwoman and Goni Kanta tended to the child, offering their devoted service, and in their joy, they experienced the bliss of true devotion.

The child, born for the purpose of spiritual awakening, was revealed as the incarnation of Uddhava. The devotees were told of this sacred vision, and they saw that the divine child had been granted to them. As he grew, he was brought to the river Chandrabhaga for ritual bathing, and the washerfolk carried him with care, ensuring that he was nurtured with love and devotion.

Seeing such a dream, Damashree rejoiced in her heart, recalling the blessed events and sitting by the riverbank, reflecting on the grace that had manifested before her eyes. Truly, this was Uddhava incarnate, arriving in the world through extraordinary means, immediately entering the sacred temple and being received with reverence. Kanta, witnessing this, was overjoyed, and the devotees beheld the divine child, knowing that they must embrace him with their own love.

Damashree, hearing of these happenings, was overcome with emotion. She embraced her son and honored the maternal care that had brought him safely into the world. For twelve days, he was nurtured, and on the seventh year, he was offered as naivedya in the temple, consecrating the sacred rites. My heart, filled with love for Pundalik, beheld Panduranga incarnate upon the earth. Though men saw only a stone deity, devotion had infused life into the name and the form.

As the devotees offered food, tears filled their eyes with love and devotion. With heartfelt offerings, they partook of the sacred food, sharing in the joy of divine grace. Over seven years, Namdev continued to call forth the presence of the stone deity, recounting various deeds and miracles, ensuring that the stories were preserved and retold for generations.

Seeking the blessings of Jnanadev, the devotees journeyed to sacred places with Namdev. Their separation from the Lord was unbearable, and yet, even in their longing, the flame of devotion blazed brightly. Disturbances arose—cattle were lost, yet they were guided back through the protection of the saints. Brave Vaishnavas of Marwar chronicled these events, affirming that the holy name and knowledge of God were eternally established.

With the blessings of Namdev, Yoginath and others devoted themselves entirely, performing loving service. Joy and wonder filled the hearts of all who witnessed the miraculous acts. Wherever obstacles arose, devotion triumphed, and sacred acts continued with delight and reverence.

The water in the wells rose miraculously at Namdev's sight, and the devotees bowed with reverence. On Shivaratri, Namdev arranged divine kirtans, drawing multitudes of listeners, including the honored Brahmins. Through these acts, the essence of devotion was made manifest, and even in the presence of distractions, the hearts of the faithful were fixed upon the divine.

Vishnudas, concerned, observed the surroundings, noting the sacred stone temple that remained intact. Though humble in worldly means, the devotees were rich in devotion, and through loving service, they shared the sacred gifts with all. Once, while conducting kirtan, Namdev declared that he would compose a hundred crore abhangs in the vernacular, and he spoke with the authority of a prince, revealing the divine plan through poetic expression.

Across lands and pilgrimage sites, his compositions spread, their count beyond measure. Forty lakh, ninety-four crore verses, and countless others flowed forth, each filled with the sweetness of divine devotion, though Vaikuntha itself remained untouched, beyond mortal perception. Yet, the incarnation of Namdev in Tuka's time revealed the bliss of name and kirtan, allowing mortals to partake in divine joy.

I had spoken previously to Uddhava, urging him to incarnate in the mortal realm, to ensure that birth and death were transcended and that the truth of divine promise was fulfilled. In the first incarnation, he had appeared in the womb in a manner beyond ordinary conception; now he would appear in Tuka's era, escaping the assault of time. This ensured the presence of devotees, and Lakshmi herself proclaimed the glory of Vaikuntha, filling the hearts of the faithful with exultation and joy.

Divine chariots descended, carrying the devotees across the lands, and gardens of sacred regions were adorned with their presence. Meeting Tuka, the world embraced the joy of devotion, and in his heart, the love of the divine was fixed forever. The path of devotion was proclaimed, the fame of Vaishnava saints was spread, and all beings were guided to the noble practice of spiritual beginnings.

On the Shuddha Ekadashi of Phalguna, the Vaikuntha residents arrived to honor the lotus feet of Rukmini, and the devotees served them with heartfelt devotion. By the banks of the Indrayani, arrangements were made for the divine assembly, where Tuka provided meals for all devotees. When the samadhi of Jnanadev was reached, Namdev arranged the sacred rites, presenting novel ceremonies and wondrous spectacles for the assembly.

Understanding the heart of Indira, the devotees, led by Tuka, contemplated divine yoga and witnessed extraordinary marvels. Vishwakarma himself appeared, establishing Vaikunthapura, adorned with the eight accomplishments, and sacred texts remained eternally present. Pearls and garlands were beautifully arranged, while the celestial hosts and Gopalas danced in joyous celebration, their every movement suffused with love and divine bliss.

Such was the vision of happiness, that even the yogis meditated in rapture, observing the form of the divine with devotion. Tuka's love, sublime and free, revealed the supreme Lord,

whose secrets no mortal could fully comprehend. Uddhava, Akrur, and the revered sages of Vaikuntha graced the place, sitting in assembly, as Narada, Tumburu, Shuka, and Yoginath harmonized their music in devotion.

The devotees were worshiped with joy beneath the garuda flag; all rituals were performed with reverent offerings. Flowers, incense, and divine sustenance were presented, and the assembly of saints and gods partook in the bliss. Freed from worldly attachments, the devotees found contentment in the taste of Brahmanic nectar, offering their hands in sacred tribute.

The learned arrived with admiration, showering flowers, proclaiming the glory of the mortal realm where the Lord of Vaikuntha had descended. For five days after Ekadashi, the festival continued in divine splendor. This, truly, was the sacred truth revealed by Tuka, known to the world through devotion and divine grace, a truth no scripture alone could convey.

All gathered with hearts fully absorbed, the people listened daily to Tuka's kirtan, their minds fixed in devotion. Yet the divine play of God, His mysterious acts, remained beyond the comprehension of all. The festival of Shimagi, a major celebration, passed without anyone indulging in dust and revelry. Dancers and performers were not brought; instead, detachment and inner discipline were nurtured in the hearts of the devotees.

Truth revealed itself clearly, while falsehoods were left aside. The people, devoted and affectionate, delighted in the bliss of hearing the kirtan. Peace and renunciation blossomed within their hearts, and compassion extended to all beings. With love and devotion, they served Pandhariraya, guided by the instruction of the world-teacher Tuka.

Tuka, the incarnation of Namdev, became renowned upon the earth. Men and women came from far and wide for his darshan, and pilgrimages overflowed with seekers. Born to uplift the world, this supreme devotee descended at the banks of the Indrayani in a sacred land of virtue. The deity resided among the devotees, and wherever pilgrims approached, the faithful could witness divine presence. Truly, no other sacred place compares to this; such is my conviction, my very life affirming it. There, Tuka's devotional songs were heard, and Sheshashayi himself descended in blessing.

Thus, on the night of Falgun Vadya Pratipada, the Supreme Lord addressed Tuka directly: "Hear My words. Tonight, let kirtan resound through all four quarters, and come with Me to behold Vaikunthapura." The devotees' hearts were held in devotion, and Tuka, their friend and beloved, listened with rapture. The proclamation of his fame would bring salvation to countless beings.

Though infinite incarnations and divine manifestations have filled the three worlds, God Himself said, "My equality will descend to this earth. Without you, it cannot be seen." Tuka, fully aware of the body and life, offered himself in sacrifice, restraining desire and anger, and calming the restless mind. Having attained the self, he remained steadfast, preserving the heart of devotion and maintaining pure love in worship.

“You are the chosen among incarnations,” the Lord said. “The way in which you descend will reveal My essence; it will not be otherwise perceived.” Divine powers were thus conferred, and liberation was never sought for the sake of union; the work of devotion alone remained the goal. Great devotees had appeared before, and others would follow, yet none possessed the impartial, unfathomable heart of Tuka.

Now, with the body intact, he would witness the celestial realms of Vaikuntha. “So shall it be,” said Chakrapani, “and Tuka shall embrace the Lord’s feet.” One voice of the Lord, united in Vaikuntha, declared that kirtan would be performed day and night, and such was fixed in the hearts of the faithful. Pandharpur, famed upon earth, would be the stage, and even mischief or evil could not disturb the sacred work there.

Observing Tuka’s inner being, the compassionate Lord spoke again: “When we go there once, the fame of the devotee will spread far and wide.” My sovereignty, like the ocean of milk, will be revealed; as I pervade all creation, so will your devotion shine. Though people may gather constantly, their faith may waver; thus, devotee, walk swiftly on the path of truth. Panduranga heard and agreed, and the sacred kirtan began, the sounds of the tala and mridang resounding.

At that moment, the name of Vitthal echoed with exultation; hands clapped in joy, and the tumult of kirtan thundered forth. Those immersed in love for God forgot their bodily awareness, as the vibrations of Brahman filled their hearts, and the listeners’ minds became singularly concentrated. Tuka, inspired, composed abhangs in his own hand, leaving no doubt or hesitation in their sacred text.

Abhangs were committed to the hands of the learned, establishing the soul’s true abode. The body, transformed in Brahmanic form, displayed the humility of austerity, shaming pride, yajna, and gifts. Pilgrims’ wandering and fatigue were overcome; heaven itself was experienced in their devotion. Blessed were those who saw Tuka; when death claimed his body, he departed with serene resolve.

His body, freed of attachment, became as a mere phantom, and his renunciation of worldly desires was complete. Night and day, he mourned the illusions of desire, anger, and pride, yet his detachment illuminated the path. The sacred fire of Brahman burned within, and the proclamation of Mahavakya resounded. With sesame offerings to the lineage, the soul was consecrated. Panduranga’s lamp shone, and the ceremony was witnessed with joy.

Across the three worlds, delight and bliss overflowed. Pride and ego were renounced, the fetters of birth and death shattered, and Narayana granted abiding presence in the hearts of devotees. Tuka’s deeds were manifested to the world, and the faithful listened, enraptured. The principles he expounded astonished the minds of listeners; celestial beings ascended in vimanas, singing in love as they heard the kirtan.

Kapil Muni and other seers, steeped in Brahmajnana, also listened, swallowing their tears in devotion. The words poured forth, and minds remained unwavering and absorbed. “Always hear this kirtan,” Tuka declared, “and the worldly soul will find true fortune.”

For this is the same Supreme Avatar, the world-liberating guru Dattatreya, who manifests self-realization while remaining present in devotion. Even the highest ascetics, the foremost among tapasvis, surrender their pride and recognize that in kirtan alone lies supreme delight. Those who prospered through yajna and charity, even in heaven, realized their humility upon hearing the kirtan. Gurus praised him, and heaven’s joys were surpassed by the taste of devotion on earth.

Wherever people moved with the winds of worldly life, wherever they visited holy sites, they served Tuka’s kirtan with love and devotion. In this way, the practice of name and kirtan made him blessed among Vaishnavas, securing the favor of Panduranga. Saints in Vaikuntha praised him, and listeners were wholly captivated. Across countless lifetimes, their accumulated virtue brought them near, allowing mortals to witness Tuka’s grace in the mortal realm.

Indeed, fortunate were those devotees who beheld Tuka, hearing the profound meaning of the scriptures as revealed in devotion. Their minds were concentrated, their ears wholly attentive, and all that passed from his mouth touched their hearts, binding them in love for the divine.

At that moment, Tuka engaged in kirtan with overflowing love, the sound resonating through every corner. He sang abhangs with such grace and skill that listeners were enraptured. Tears filled their eyes, and their hearts bowed humbly at his feet. The path of devotion was fully illuminated, and love remained steadfast in every note of the kirtan.

He measured his words carefully, and the devotees, embracing the sacred syllables of Hari’s name, shared in the blessing. Tuka became one with Panduranga, absorbed entirely in divine love. The kirtan continued through all four prahars, from sunrise when the golden sun warmed Rukmini, to the joyful rhythms of Vitthal’s name. Tuka, lost in devotion, danced with rapture, transcending all bodily awareness, and the assembled crowd shared in his bliss.

In the culmination of his grace, he composed sacred texts in majestic form, so that their recitation would be preserved for generations. His abhangs instructed the devotees in the path of devotion. Logical debates were set aside; the only remembrance required was of Panduranga. Tuka, as a servant of the Lord, guided the people, declaring the supremacy of devotion and the resonance of God’s name.

At the proper time, he received the Lord’s instruction to journey to Vaikunthapura. With the celestial Pushpaka ready, he was led by the highest authority, and Tuka’s feet were honored with reverent embrace. Setting forth, he left behind a legacy of sacred fame, instructing his beloved family at home to continue the devotion. He taught eleven abhangs as spiritual guidance, turning words into living truth.

Even the expectant mother, five months pregnant, continued her duties, milking the buffalo and caring for the children, while the household marveled at Tuka's wisdom and love. The Vaishnav devotees observed his instructions with devotion, understanding that no injustice was involved, and even sudden questions were answered with steadfast certainty. No obstacle, nor worldly fear, could hinder the faithful from following the path to Vaikuntha.

Tuka's household duties were performed with devotion; the sweetness of daily life was relished, yet never repeated in haste. Life's flow, like the waters of the Ganges merging with the ocean, never returned to its source. He ensured all arrangements were in divine order, paying homage to God, chanting His name, and moving forward without attachment.

The devotees, filled with love and reverence, wept upon hearing his teachings. Though Tuka departed in body to Vaikunthabhumi, the impression of his devotion remained undiminished. On the journey, people spoke among themselves of the ineffable grace and certainty of his path. Some accompanied him to distant holy places, following the rhythm of his devotion, and all hearts resonated with the spirit of pilgrimage.

Tuka's journey revealed the truth that worldly deeds and falsehoods are of no consequence; only devotion matters. His detachment from worldly concerns, renunciation of fear, and mastery over desire became a living example. Even when faced with social expectations, temptations, or judgment, Tuka remained singularly absorbed in God. The world, its customs, and its scrutiny did not sway his heart; the Divine alone guided him.

He had forgotten lineage and worldly conduct, offering his service wholly to the Lord. The household fears and modesty dissolved in infinite love, and Tuka's mind overflowed with devotion. He remained silent to false gossip and idle talk, his consciousness wholly in God. Even the chiefs and authorities observed his steadfastness; Tuka alone remained fully absorbed in Hari's name.

Without regard for worldly attachment, he seated himself in devotion. Family ties and social obligations were honored in spirit, but they did not distract him. Any obstacle, any ill-will, was powerless before his unwavering love. He made clear that the supreme offering was devotion itself, and every soul was blessed by his pure-hearted guidance.

Thus, Tuka's life became a beacon for all: in his devotion, in his abhangs, in his renunciation, he revealed the eternal path. Those who offered themselves in love and service to God, following his example, became united with the Infinite. Through Tuka, the devotees realized the bliss of God's name, the liberation of the heart, and the joy of living in constant remembrance of Panduranga.

Even for a brief moment, we were free from worldly distractions, enjoying profound inner bliss. Our household duties were managed with care, and any surplus trouble or sorrow was set aside. Tuka declared that now there was no coming or going for him; he remained entirely at the feet of the Infinite.

We, as a family, were united and self-sufficient, needing no other support. Solitude became our shared companion, yet all worldly pleasures were offered to Hari. Tuka insisted that the body be devoted in one place, where no one else intrudes. Life was now a single consciousness, nothing separate remained; we were not apart from Narayana, and we preserved the teachings of the past. The result of our efforts bore sweet fruit, and the trials of time passed away.

We laughed and played, deepening our affection, and in service and joyful words, we became one with Narayana. Tuka said that our hearts had become free from attachment, entirely surrendered to the Lord. No one from the household dared disturb us; even when provoked with harsh words or criticism, we remained serene. He taught that devotion transcends bodily awareness, and separation from Hari was unthinkable.

Tuka warned us not to dance to worldly expectations, nor to indulge in fleeting desires. Both the husband and God reside within the same heart; attachment to one does not exclude the other. At every moment, we exercised caution and virtue, avoiding vice and fully immersing ourselves in devotion. Any social or familial pressures were met with steadfast detachment. He instructed that no worldly desire should tempt the heart, and all decisions must align with the path of devotion.

In the household, the sweetness of daily life continued, yet worldly fears were gone. Death, too, had been faced and understood; now there was no dread, no hesitation. Tuka reminded the women to remain steadfast, fearless in service, allowing the husband and Narayana to coexist in the heart. He emphasized boldness and courage in devotion, comparing it to a moth that faithfully circles the flame.

He taught that worldly proprieties, and even social conventions, are secondary to the love of God. The mind must be firm and steadfast, and all distractions sealed away. Tuka's instructions guided us: the senses, the tongue, the hands, the heart—everything devoted to God. And thus, the household found rest, and the blessings of virtue, wealth, and spiritual duty were united in harmony.

Finally, we were ready to depart for Vaikunthapura. Tuka entrusted all to divine grace, guiding everyone with prayers and blessings. Panduranga arose before us as we prepared for the journey, calling us to Sri Ranga, the abode of bliss. At the appointed time, the Lord took Tuka with him, and he departed secretly, leaving behind earthly bonds but taking his eternal devotion with him.

The abhangs he spoke in response to our devotion revealed immense wonder. Suras and divine beings ascended in flying chariots, singing praises. Narad and the celestial musicians accompanied them. Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, and other deities, along with siddhas, sages, Yakshas, Kinnaras, and other celestial beings, gathered to witness the spectacle.

Great devotees of the past and present ages, including saints of the current age of Kali, took their places in the flying chariots. Tuka appeared in divine form, luminous as Brahman, his

body manifesting the consciousness of pure devotion. All illusion and vanity were gone, and the devotees recognized in him the hero of Nama, the Vaishnava warrior who, through kirtan and devotion, uplifted the world.

With Purandar and the celestial beings proclaiming the glory of God, the Pushpaka chariot illuminated the sky, eclipsing the sun's rays. People on earth gazed in awe, their eyes filled with wonder, though Tuka was no longer visible to them. A great wave of sorrow swept the villages, for the devotees felt the absence of his earthly presence. Yet those who had observed his life closely remembered his teachings, his love, and his service, and took comfort in the divine vision of his ultimate union with Vaikuntha.

Even as children cried for their mother, and the women lamented his departure, Tuka's guidance and abhangs left an indelible mark. The journey was complete, and though sorrow flooded the hearts of villagers, the eternal truths he had imparted were safely enshrined in the hearts and minds of all who had witnessed his devotion.

Just as the cowherds of Gokul grieved at parting from Krishna, so too did the world lament when Tuka was no longer visible to their eyes. The devotees longed to behold his sacred form, and the sight of his divine presence filled every onlooker with awe. They scanned in every direction, yet Tuka's eyes did not meet theirs.

The time was precisely known: the fifteenth year, the seventy-first, according to the cycle of the opponents; on the second day of Phalguna, under the full moon, four hours marked the sacred hour. At that moment, the world's guru, Tuka—the devoted Vaishnava—departed in secret. Devotees, bound in love and devotion, mourned deeply.

As the moment of departure arrived, abhangs were recited, and the Ganges itself seemed to weep. Tears flowed across the earth; love and devotion overflowed, unimaginable to the three worlds. Avli, the devoted mother, wept at that hour, calling Tuka from afar. In that moment of seeming unreality, she remained within her home, bound by worldly duty.

The fire of his renunciation ignited a flame in her body; she felt the anguish of separation, yet he had already departed. Had she understood the truth in advance, she would have held his garments close, but as a pregnant woman, ignorant and surrounded by household responsibilities, she could do nothing. Overwhelmed, she fainted. Mahadev, Vitthoba, and Kumara themselves wept at her grief.

All awaited the arrival of the devoted Vaishnava who would follow him. They sat through the sunset, then retired to their homes. The vision of Tuka drew devotees from far and wide; they journeyed long distances, only to witness the glory he left behind. He scattered fame and devotion across the three worlds, and through Tuka, Pandharinath received his feet in reverence.

Even as he departed with his body to Vaikuntha, the miraculous sight astonished all. Those who witnessed it spoke truthfully; those with doubt were misled by illusion. The compulsions of worldly affection were destroyed; all illusions vanished.

In his earthly abode, Tuka was joined by fourteen devoted Vaishnavas, steadfast at his side: Shatshastri Brahmin Rameshwar, Kanha, Tuka's brother, Mavals like Ganga, Kondoba the Brahmin Lohkar, Santaji Teli Jaganadya who chronicled his deeds, and other newly initiated devotees who upheld true discernment. These fourteen never left his house; even once, if the true Guru had shown his feet, their lives would have been saved.

Kanha, Tuka's brother, mourned deeply, expressing sorrow in abhangs filled with compassion. They sang of grief, their hearts heavy, their throats choked with lamentation. Young children cried with tender words, shaking the earth with their wailing. Though they lacked the power to join him, their very being longed to merge with Tuka's presence.

Kanha prayed that the divine, through enjoyment and liberation, bring him swiftly to Tuka. May prosperity, spiritual power, and moksha be wrapped together and delivered to him quickly. Even if Tuka could not appear on earth, let Panduranga bless him. The brotherhood that had formed in love sought to carry forward his glory; no worldly power could undo it.

"Now what folly can we commit?" they asked. "Days remain, so let the heart rest. Weep if you must, but none can prevent what is ordained." Kanha insisted that the heart remain firm, the brother's path secured. In all households where devotees awaited, his memory was cherished; he had left an indelible mark on all.

He who had been bound in friendship and devotion, who had merged his heart with God, now lived in eternal communion. The grief of separation rolled in waves, but steadfast courage and unwavering devotion endured. Kanha, Tuka's brother, expressed the deep sorrow of their loss through tender words, and thirteen other Vaishnava warriors sat in silent reverence by his side.

For three days and nights, the devotees remained on the banks of the Indrayani, immersed in meditation on Tuka. The hearts of all householders, warriors, and devotees felt the pangs of earthly suffering, yet they clung to the memory of his devotion and the eternal vision of his divine presence.

Devotees looked in all ten directions, some gazing up at the sky, seeking the sacred path. It was the morning of the fifth day, a time precisely marked, and the events that unfolded are now recounted.

Tuka's hands held his sacred seat, and his wooden staff rested constantly with him. A cloth covered his body, and it was quickly lifted upwards, signaling the sacred moment. Then it was revealed: the true Guru had become a resident of Vaikuntha. Following the rites, he bathed in the Indrayani and was laid near the temple.

Devotees came from far and wide to witness the sight of the sacred cloth and hair—this was Tuka's final darshan. Tears filled every eye, streaming freely. Brahmin Rameshwar, well-versed and steadfast, consulted with Kanha to decide the auspicious place for the rites, according to scriptural guidance. Rameshwar explained: Tuka, detached from all worldly duties, had departed his mortal frame and gone to the abode of Lord Vishnu. On the second day of Phalguna, the Guru became a resident of Vaikuntha, and the sacred cloth and hair reached his family on the fifth day.

That day, the fifth, was observed with ceremonies. Brahmins were honored, Vaishnavas gathered, and kirtan in praise of Hari began. Even though his mortal body was no longer alive, he retained spiritual authority, and the Guru's pastimes were spoken of with devotion.

No pandit, Vedic scholar, or master of ten scriptures could fully comprehend Tuka's spiritual essence. Scriptures, Puranas, and the Gita, all read in proper sequence, failed to capture the depth of his deeds. Renowned poets and masters of art were left in awe, unable to match the brilliance of his life. Rameshwar recounted all, seated in a flying vimana, narrating Tuka's life to the faithful.

Thus, the infinite power of Vaishnavi maya could not touch Tuka. Even in the shedding of his mortal form, he became Brahman himself, manifesting the supreme form of divinity.

Tuka, the living avatar of the Lord's name in the realm of mortals, displayed divine pastimes and revived the path of devotion for humanity. Rameshwar declared this, and the saints hailed the news with chants of victory. On the fifth day of the bright fortnight of Phalguna, celebrations began in earnest.

Through sweet offerings and elaborate rituals, Brahmins were seated and worshipped with devotion. From the fifth to the sixth day, Vaishnava devotees performed kirtan without pause. On the seventh day, the celebrations reached their peak, filled with joy.

Tuka's sons, Mahadev and Vitthoba, and Kanta, who was pregnant, had completed the ninth month. The child born, a symbol of devotion and renunciation, was named Narayan, bringing immense joy to the saints.

During these days, Shivaji, the king, came to have darshan of Tuka. Four villages were granted as gifts, and the pinnacle of Vitthoba was established. Wealth and prosperity flowed, but renunciation remained their guiding principle. Brahmins were consulted, and pilgrimages were undertaken, including to Dwarka.

Tuka's son, Narayan, was offered in devotion, and eleven devotees carried offerings as instructed by Rameshwar. Tuka's abhangs were widely recited, and Narayan Baba, the Vaishnava warrior, led kirtan in praise of Hari.

Mahadev and Vitthoba, his fathers, gave their consent according to his wishes. Tuka himself, though now a resident of Vaikuntha, continued to grant darshan to devotees through divine grace.

Kanha, with compassion, received Tuka's vision in a dream. Kannada language, a connection with the Sudaumbarya, and many devoted services had helped devotees turn away from worldly attachment. Tuka's name became a beacon, his conduct supremely virtuous, and he abandoned all worldly transactions, embracing satsang and devotion fully.

One day, in seclusion, the devotees prayed to Tuka, seeking his mercy at the time of their death, that they might behold the Lord through him. Observing their heartfelt devotion, Tuka blessed them, and then departed to Vaikuntha with his mortal body, remaining ever in their meditations and scriptures.

In solitude, saints were informed of the truth: Tuka had decreed that at the time of death, his devotees would receive darshan, and that sacred presence was indeed granted. Days passed, and the final hour arrived; the mortal body was lovingly prepared and sent forth.

Rameshwar Bhatt, a distinguished Brahmin, Kanha, Tuka's brother, and the young son Narayan accompanied the sacred proceedings. Seated respectfully, Vaishnava warriors performed all rituals, welcoming Tuka's presence in reverence, offering flowers and salutations.

Tuka himself, through his compassion, allowed devotees to witness these events, and all marveled at the sacred arrangements. Walls and wooden supports could not hide the splendor of the ceremonial garlands, which were visible to all. Vaishnavas chanted joyfully, singing the sacred name.

Remembering Vitthala, Tuka departed from his body, leaving the world profoundly blessed. All who witnessed were indeed fortunate, beholding Tuka as a living representation of the Lord, a manifestation of divine form. The saints and devotees beheld this leela, a testimony of his divine mission, and Narayan Gosavi Pimpalnerkar, along with Bahinabai Gangadhar, received his grace in dreams.

The world-savior, the spiritual Guru, had united devotees with Tuka. His presence remained ever in their hearts, and his teachings and texts were preserved. The Bhaktalilamrut, a magnificent compilation of Tuka's life and devotion, became a treasured scripture.

Wise devotees, lovers of truth, and saints received this divine work with devotion. Those misled by jealousy or ignorance could not grasp its spiritual light. Even if worldly merit was established, faith in Tuka's work remained unshakable. The Bhaktalilamrut thus stands as a source of joy and guidance, comprising forty chapters, fulfilling the desires of loving, devoted hearts.

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Chapter 41

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (In the name of Lord Śrī Gaṇeśa)

I had heard of many paths of spiritual discipline from various sources, yet none of them touched my heart deeply. At last, in the pure and truthful praises of the saints, my speech became absorbed with genuine devotion. Some perform austerities of yoga and sacrificial rites; others observe great vows and disciplines. As for me, I have become a humble bard of the devotees of Lord Viṣṇu, singing their supreme and noble glory. By their grace alone, they cause their own lives and deeds to be written through my hand. Otherwise, the whole world knows that I am ignorant and dull-witted. The Lord of all gods, the beloved of Rukmiṇī, holds the reins of destiny in His hands, and it is He who speaks forth the histories of His servants through the mouths of others. I am devoid of skill and art, unable even to weave together the garland of words. But He, the charioteer of my intellect, the very life of the universe, knows the cause and purpose of all.

In the previous chapter, the beautiful story of Śrī Tukārām, the valiant Vaiṣṇava, was told in detail and listened to with devotion by the pious. Now, in the city of Bijapur, there lived a great devotee named Keśava Svāmī — a vast ocean of bhakti and jnāna, with the full wealth of renunciation shining in his life. He worshipped Śrī Pāṇḍuraṅga in the proper manner, offering service and adoration; at all times he remembered the holy Name and meditated upon the Lord's divine form, day and night. Though firmly established in self-knowledge, he cherished deep love for the Lord's embodied form. Such a combination is rare in the world, even if one were to search everywhere.

He was outwardly handsome, a river of beauty in his person, and his wife was devoted to him with the faithfulness of a pativratā. To behold such a pair was rare indeed. The adornment of Keśava Svāmī's very being was the fullness of devotion, wisdom, and renunciation. His poetic speech was like prasāda itself — words that delighted the heart upon hearing.

Filled with compassion for all beings, seeing the entire world as his own Self, he would speak only what arose from such realisation. In the months of Āṣāḍha and Kārtika, he would go unfailingly to Paṇḍharpur, leading the pilgrim procession with love in his heart. When such a valiant Vaiṣṇava sang kīrtana, there was great joy and enthusiasm among the people, and his fame spread widely. All honoured him everywhere, for the Lord, the very life of the universe, looked upon him with grace. Indeed, the Lord had assumed a visible form to uplift the world.

Yet the great praise of the people began to weary his mind. One night, without telling anyone, he quietly left in the middle of the night. His heart was fixed on one purpose — to go and bathe at the bank of the Kṛṣṇā River. Speaking thus to himself, he set out swiftly, chanting the Lord's name with loving fervour.

As he walked quickly along the path, lo! The Lord of Paṇḍharpur appeared in the form of a small child and seated Himself upon Keśava's shoulder. The devotee sang verses on the lives of Viṣṇu's bhaktas in many ways, and the Lord, seated there, listened with overflowing love.

Along the way, a farmer was sitting upon a threshing floor. Seeing the beautiful child seated upon Keśava's shoulder, the farmer's heart was instantly captivated. His eyes became entangled in that vision of beauty, but before he could speak, the saint had gone far ahead.

The farmer felt a sudden pang in his soul. "Never have I seen such a child," he thought. "If only I could have taken Him into my arms, my heart would have been satisfied." That radiant form remained before his eyes, and he could think of neither food nor water, nor find rest in sleep.

Meanwhile, Keśava Svāmī arrived swiftly at the Kṛṣṇā River. With repentance in his heart, he bathed there, and remained for three nights. On his way back, he again passed along the same path, where the farmer had been waiting for him.

The farmer saw the saint and bowed deeply, joining his hands in reverence, and spoke sweet words: "Swāmī, when you passed this way before, there was a child upon your shoulder. That form was so beautiful it stole my heart. But now you come without Him, and my eyes have grown weary in waiting."

Hearing this, Keśava Svāmī was astonished. "I have never in my life taken anyone's child upon my shoulder! What is this the farmer says?" His heart was filled with wonder.

He went swiftly into a forest, sat alone, and steadied his mind in one-pointed meditation, closing his eyes. "O Lord of Paṇḍharpur, God of gods," he prayed, "I serve you unceasingly. Yet why, O Lotus-eyed One, do you not grant me your vision? And when you did take a child's form and sit upon my shoulder, why did you reveal yourself to an unlettered farmer instead of to me? Why do you flee from those who love you, and yet stand before the godless and the hostile? When you crawled upon the dust of Vraja, You hid your lotus face from mother Yaśodā, but appeared openly before the wicked Kaṁsa. Such seems to be your nature — to conceal yourself from the yearning soul. Now, putting aside all thoughts, grant me your darśana here and now. If you will not come to me at this moment, I shall give up my very life."

Thus he called upon the Lord with intense, loving desperation, and the heart of Rukmiṇī's beloved was moved. Suddenly, in full embodied form, Śrī Hari appeared before him. Keśava opened his eyes — and there stood the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha!

Dark as a fresh raincloud, tender in form, adorned with gleaming earrings, clad in a radiant yellow garment whose splendour dazzled the eyes, He shone in front of the devotee. What yogis hold as their innermost meditation, what Rudra himself worships — that was now before Keśava Svāmī's very eyes.

The Lord spoke nectar-like words: “When you were hurrying to the Kṛṣṇā River, it was I Myself who sat upon your shoulder. But you were so absorbed in the bliss of devotion that you had no awareness of the body, and thus you did not see me with your eyes.”

The Lord then said, “Now return swiftly to Bijapur and perform kīrtana there without ceasing. This alone is your true worship — let no other thought arise in your mind.” Speaking thus, the Lord withdrew from sight, yet He made His dwelling in the sacred temple of His devotee’s heart.

Receiving the Lord’s words as the highest honour, Keśava Svāmī returned to Bijapur. The loving and devout people there were overjoyed at his return.

At that time, a strange and wondrous incident came to pass. In the city lived a wealthy merchant, ever prosperous and content. Once, spending fifty thousand silver coins, he had built a splendid temple, and after performing planetary appeasement rites, he generously fed and gifted many learned brāhmaṇas.

Yet within his grand mansion, two brahmarākṣasas had taken up abode. Each night, when the master of the house had fallen asleep, they would seize him and throw him outside. Terrified by these demons, the merchant abandoned that mansion and went to live elsewhere with his wife and children.

In the hope of driving away the spirits, he performed severe rites and rituals, but no remedy succeeded. Learned brāhmaṇas well-versed in mantras also attempted to expel them — reciting the five-syllable mantra and blowing sacred ash at the doors — but upon entering, they too were seized and bound by the rākṣasas. Many such efforts failed, and all agreed that no mantra could prevail.

Then some pious men advised the merchant wisely: “Invite Keśava Svāmī, the perfect Vaiṣṇava, to perform kīrtana in the mansion. At the very sound of the Lord’s Holy Name, these spirits will depart forever.” The merchant accepted their counsel and went with folded hands to request the saint’s presence.

Without delay, the valiant Vaiṣṇava came with a great company of devotees. Sweetly resounded the cymbals and the mṛdaṅga; the very sky seemed filled with the music. Rows of pilgrims with flags marched ahead, their voices ringing in the proclamation of the Lord’s glory. The air roared with the sound of the divine Name: “Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Hari, Govinda, Acyuta, Ananta, source of bliss! Supreme Person, embodiment of sat–cit–ānanda, O Śrī Mukunda, Guru of the world!”

Thus singing with love, Keśava entered the mansion. Instantly the brahmarākṣasas appeared before him, folded their hands, and spoke in gentle tones: “At the very sight of you, our deliverance is complete.” So saying, they vanished.

All present were filled with wonder at this marvel. The news spread quickly through the entire area, and crowds came in great numbers to attend the kīrtana. The hall was so

thronged that not even a needle could have fallen to the ground. Listening to Keśava's gracious words, the fortunate devotees became absorbed in the Name and form of the Lord, losing all bodily awareness.

For four watches of the night the kīrtana continued, until at last the sun rose in splendour. The saint then performed the fivefold ārati, waving the lights before Śrī Rukmiṇī's Lord. The merchant, overjoyed, arranged a great feast, feeding a thousand people in the temple, and afterwards returned to his home in peace with his family.

Another incident should be heard, O pious listeners. In those days there was a renowned Pathān noble named Bājīd, a commander in the service of the royal sūbah of Bijapur. He commanded an army of twenty-five thousand, and no enemy could stand before him. Travelling across Hindustān, he amassed immense wealth, and at last returned to his homeland with his vast host.

On the way, an event occurred. A camel laden with the treasure chest suddenly collapsed, its belly burst open, and it died. The guards removed the load, placed it upon the ground, and sat beside it to protect it. Shortly after, Bājīd's own procession arrived, with elephants, horses, palanquins, and chariots. Seeing the guards, he asked why they were sitting there. They explained that the camel was dead.

The commander, who had never before seen death, could not understand. In his family, neither his parents, grandparents, brothers, sons, nor wife had ever died in his presence, nor had he heard of it directly. Even hearing of the misfortunes of others was distasteful to him, and thus he had never truly known sorrow. Immersed in worldly pleasures, he was ignorant of the reality of mortality.

He ordered the camel to be driven on, but the guards replied that its life had departed. Puzzled and uneasy, he asked how such a thing could happen. Fearing his displeasure, they placed the dead beast upon four poles, carried it off the road, and replaced the treasure upon another animal.

But in his mind the thought arose: "If such is the fate of a camel, then the same must one day befall my own body, which is but perishable flesh." At once, the seed of true renunciation sprouted in his heart. He dismissed all his troops save a few, and divided much of his wealth among the needy. His garments, ornaments, and jewels he gave to brāhmaṇas, and became utterly free of worldly desire.

In his own language he composed wise sayings — fifty in all — of which two are set down here for the noble-hearted: "O mind, sit and worship Rāma while there is yet time. Soon the days will pass, and you will be turned to dust. Wear the tulasī garland and remember Śyāma; even a single meal taken from your own hand is enough."

Thus, with this realisation in his heart, he overcame the six inner enemies and became steadfast in pure sattva. Coming to Bijapur, he sought refuge at the lotus feet of Keśava

Svāmī. Receiving the saint's grace, he devoted himself to the worship of Śrī Rāma, and by the Guru's blessing, he was instantly inspired with poetic power. With loving skill he performed kīrtana, delighting the listeners. Many verses he composed, but he placed above all the abhanga of his master, and his fame grew greatly, crowned with the vision of the Lord.

Now hear yet another wondrous saintly tale, O faithful. There was the world-renowned Santobā Pawār, who dwelt at Rānjaṇgāon. No one else was granted such service to the Sadguru as he. How that came to pass and in what manner his heart's wish was fulfilled — that story too must be told.

In the time of Śivājī, the virtuous king, Santobā served as a commander, with two hundred horsemen under him and the grant of a village in jāgīr for his maintenance. In the village of Sandasachī Ranjan there dwelt a family of noble repute. All were endowed with honour, respect, and prosperity; yet the couple was bereft of offspring. The master of the house, Santoba, had for his consort a lady of virtuous qualities, named Yesubai. They two, husband and wife, lived in perfect fidelity and affection.

One day, Yesubai, moved by concern for the lineage, said to her husband, "At this juncture, take a second wife. Thus the family line shall continue; this thought has arisen within me." Santoba, hearing her words, replied gently, "If my heart is now bound in love to you, then division will surely enter between us."

Santoba had a brother whose two young sons were dear to him as his own children. He delighted in clothing them in fine garments and adorning them with ornaments. When these boys were about five or seven years of age, Santoba said to Pantojī, a respected teacher, "Instruct these lads in writing." He appointed for him a wage of a hundred silver coins, and Pantojī began to teach them within the courtyard.

At times, Santoba would visit Pantojī to enquire about the children's learning. On one such occasion, he found Pantojī seated after bathing, engaged in mental worship. With a woollen shawl drawn over his head, he was chanting with inward devotion. Santoba asked, "What is it that you are murmuring?" Pantojī answered, "My revered Guru has given me a certain mantra, which I now recite." Santoba, bowing at his feet, said, "Grant that sacred mantra to me also."

Pantojī replied, "One should first seek the Guru's consent and receive his favour. I am but your humble servant, staying here only for the sake of my livelihood." Hearing this, Santoba, the devoted servant of the Guru, thought within himself, "Here is the very purpose for which I was born." He reflected on the fleeting nature of the body and the restless changes of the mind.

Without delay, he brought the requisite offerings for worship, approached the Guru's feet, and obtained his blessing. As Pantojī was now relieved from the duty of teaching the boys, Santoba engaged another teacher, and himself began to serve the Guru with zeal. He

brought every article needed for worship—garments, ornaments, incense, and lamps—and performed all rites with devotion. Thousands of Brahmins were fed, kirtans resounded, and the joy of service filled the place.

A new temple was built for the Guru's residence, with a Brahmin appointed to prepare the daily offerings. Servants and maidservants were engaged for the Guru's household, and a thousand coins were set aside for expenses. Then Santoba spoke to his wife Kanta, "I must now depart with the army on a distant campaign. As I will be away, do you see that the Guru's needs are met and enquire of his welfare."

Yesubai consented readily, and, bowing at the Guru's feet, Santoba departed with his forces, taking with him the wealth and resources of the estate. By his command, all arrangements for the Guru's service continued without lack—rich garments, ornaments, and sweet food were daily provided.

Yet the Guru's household was troubled, for he had no family of his own. His body, once youthful, began to know the stirrings of worldly desire, and his mind inclined towards sense pleasures. Among the attendants was a maidservant, and the Guru fell into improper relations with her. Word of this reached the steward, who was already of crooked mind; finding such a fault, he spread it with malice. "Santoba," they whispered, "is a simple, trusting soul. His Guru was once of high repute, but now is entangled in vice."

Some said that Santoba was repaying a past debt to the Guru, yet his master had fallen into sensuality. They brought these tidings to Yesubai, who, steadfast in her virtue, answered, "It is useless to slander. When the Subhedar returns with the army, and the truth is known, you will be put to shame." Thus she dismissed their gossip and continued to serve the Guru with respect, making no breach in her devotion.

A full year passed, and Santoba returned. The officers met him and led him to the Guru's abode. First, he went to the Guru's own quarters, prostrated upon the ground, and embraced him with love, feeling peace in his heart. The next day, he prepared for the great worship of the Guru, when the malicious ones approached and whispered into his ear, "You desire to worship, but know that the Guru's heart is set upon that maidservant."

Santoba only smiled and replied with sweet words, "In truth, when one enters worldly life, the Guru is as a father; and if in worship there is also a mother, then indeed is the service complete." With such pure-hearted thought, he celebrated the festival with joy—stringing flowers upon the temple, offering garments and ornaments, waving incense and lamps, and giving to the Guru's consort the same ornaments that adorned his own wife. He bowed before both and declared, "This is a most blessed day."

Thus the Guru was honoured, Brahmins were feasted, and none dared speak ill. Those who had been slanderers were put to silent shame, as darkness is dispelled when the sun rises. By Santoba's pure mind, foes became as friends, and the Guru's fault was veiled by the

devotee's virtue. The Lord of Vaikuntha, beholding such unswerving service, was well pleased.

Santoba's devotion grew ever greater; day by day his love for the Guru deepened. He thought, "The Guru's form is my very own self; he has been worshipped rightly. Now let me offer him devotion mingled with detachment." At that moment, as if by divine ordinance, he heard two of Tukoba's abhanga verses sung during a kirtan. His heart was pierced with the desire to renounce the world. "Let me now forsake home and body," he resolved, "and worship Pandharinath alone."

Distributing his garments, ornaments, and wealth to the Brahmins, he clothed himself in a simple robe and sat apart upon a riverbank. His wife, the faithful Yesubai, sought him out, saying, "Why have you come here? Give up this attachment to worldly ties."

He answered, "As the shadow clings to the body, so does illusion cling to Brahman. Thus am I bound at your feet; there is no place left for me to go."

Santoba, the inner witness, was complete in himself, knowing well the true signs of devotion and detachment. He would say, "Living upon leaves and tree bark is no hardship; but we shall never partake of worldly food." Hearing these words, the wise lady before him abandoned her garments and ornaments, and, undertaking a fast for three days, was at last granted the vision of the Lord in His manifest form.

Panduranga Himself appeared before her, His divine figure radiant, and embraced her with tender affection, saying, "I dwell ever within your heart, O beloved of Lakshmi; grieve not over any separation from Me." Then He instructed her, "Henceforth, take alms and partake of food thus obtained, and worship Me with love." So saying, the Lord of Rukmini vanished from her sight.

Santoba's state was unparalleled, for while dwelling in the body, he had attained the bodiless state. His limitless devotion to the Sadguru had pleased the Lord Himself. Many more wondrous deeds he performed, revealing divine marvels to the people and inspiring countless souls to adopt pure devotion, holding fast to the state of selfless love.

Now shall be told the account of another loving devotee—Malopant—whom the Lord of Pandharpur also favored. This tale too is most wondrous; hear it with the heart of a true devotee. Malopant had once dwelt in the land of Varad, an exceedingly virtuous and meritorious man, devoted to the worship of Vitthala. He was a respected householder and merchant of good repute, who conducted his trade in Karnataka. There he resided with his family, keeping the remembrance of the Lord ever in his mind.

He had a son of noble disposition named Narahari. Both father and son were of saintly temperament, ever guided by discernment, and full of compassion toward all beings, esteeming others as their very selves. For the sake of the poor and the guest, Malopant was

ever ready to give food in charity. He worshipped Vishnu without ceasing, loved to sing the praises of Shri Hari, served the saints with devotion, and never uttered a false word.

One day, the course of fate changed. His wife departed from this world, bringing sorrow to his heart. Yet, reflecting inwardly, he said, “It is well that this bond of worldly life is broken,” and, remembering the Lord of Rukmini, he resolved to tear down the house of ignorance within himself. But people around him insisted he remarry. A bride was found from the village of Hedi, and the wedding took place at once. In time, this alliance proved to be the cause of deep suffering.

For one day, the bride’s father appeared and revealed the truth. He was of a nameless, lowly caste and said, “My daughter was abducted in the dead of night; that same girl you have made your wife. This is a certain breach of propriety.” Hearing this confession, Malopant’s heart was seized with great remorse, and he cried out to the Lord of Vaikuntha, “Save me, O Redeemer of the fallen! In all the three worlds, I am the most sinful!”

He summoned his wife and asked if she recognized her father. She understood in her heart, but spoke not a word to him. Malopant told the man, “Take your daughter with you, and tell us plainly, as a Brahmin would, what must be done.” But the man replied, “What is the use of taking away a defiled vessel? Once it has been put to use, keeping it would bring sin upon me.” Saying so, he returned to his village. The people now spoke everywhere that Malopant was defiled, and the bride fled in the night with another man, abandoning him.

From being prosperous in worldly life, Malopant now found himself surrounded by slanderers. Misfortune struck with cruel force, and all his household companions departed, leaving only his noble son Narahari by his side. Even his kin and caste-fellows abandoned him, casting him out. Yet through this bitter repentance, his sins were wholly consumed.

At last, he summoned Brahmins and freely gave away all his wealth and possessions. For the rest of his days, he devoted himself to the worship of Shri Hari with loving zeal. Then, standing before the assembly of learned men, bowing low, he said, “Tell me quickly the means of atonement.” The Vedic scholars searched the sacred texts but could find no prescribed penance for such a case.

Hearing their reply, Malopant said, “This is exactly as I expected. Then what means is there?” They answered, “You must make a great drum from tamarind wood. Enter into it, fill it with dried cow-dung, and yourself set fire to it. This will be a bodily atonement; thus your sin will be destroyed.”

Malopant accepted without hesitation, saying, “Whatever deed is done must be endured; I shall not turn from it.” So he entered the drum with loving devotion, filled it with fuel, and set it alight, keeping the form of Panduranga fixed in his heart, even laughing aloud in ecstasy. He cried, “O Vitthal, O Kuladevi of Pandharpur, now come swiftly and free me from the bonds of karma! Wealth, which I once called friend, has deserted me; all companions have gone; my family, honor, and possessions have vanished—now break the bondage of this

body also! Even if the sky should fall upon me, only let Your remembrance abide in my heart—that is all I seek, O Lord Hari!"

Thus resolved, he closed his eyes, fixing them upon the inner vision of Vitthala, which is the very joy and rest sought by yogis. He meditated with one-pointed mind, his lips chanting the holy names—Keshava, Narayana, Madhusudana, Patitapavana, ocean of compassion, Achyuta, Govinda, Supreme Purusha, Sat-Chit-Ananda, delight of the world, Mukunda, Lord of the universe. "O Krishna, Vishnu, dark as the rain-cloud, protector of devotees, Supreme among men, grant me only that my heart may rest in Your worship with love!"

In this way Malopant performed his loving worship, tears flowing from his eyes, until the Lord of Vaikuntha Himself appeared. At that very moment, though the fire blazed fiercely, a strong wind arose, and the flames became cool to his body. The people marvelled, saying, "The glory of the Name is deep and wondrous—fire cannot burn the protector of the world!" Just as in ancient times Prahlada was not consumed in the fire by the grace of the Lord, so it was with Malopant.

When the drum was consumed, the embers fell away, and from within emerged the divine and loving devotee, unharmed, shining with the radiance of one protected by the Lord Himself.

All the people were filled with wonder, exclaiming how blessed was this man's loving devotion. In the time of peril, the Lord of Lakṣmī Himself had come to his aid, and thus a most extraordinary fame had spread around him. They began to address Mālopanta with reverence, saying, "Indeed, you are a pure and meritorious soul. The Lord of Paṇḍharī has delivered you in distress; not a blemish rests upon you."

Casting aside every worldly occupation, Mālopanta immersed himself wholly in the singing of the Lord's glories. His speech, steeped in the nectar of compassion, carried the sweetness and dignity that mark the words of saints. Meanwhile, the daughter of a nameless family, without her own knowledge, had once been married. By the grace of fate, she now came into the company of the virtuous, and repentance began to awaken within her heart.

One day, she approached Mālopanta and humbly said, "Tell me, I beg you, some way by which I might be saved. Though many lifetimes pass, whatever is destined will eventually come to pass." Hearing her, the Vaiṣṇava devotee replied gently, "You have committed no wrong in truth. Your father abandoned you, yet now we shall provide you food and clothing. And if you truly wish to know the means of deliverance, then hold fast to the one counsel I give you — at all times remember Śrī Hari, and speak of nothing else."

Assenting to this, the lady bowed from afar, keeping a little hut in which she dwelt apart. She purified her clothing and utensils, bathed daily without fail, and cultivated a deep love for the remembrance of the Lord, never allowing her mind to wander away from it. Whatever food was served into her vessel, she received from the hands of others, partook

of only that measure, and then returned to immerse her heart in the loving memory of the Lord.

Through the virtues born of holy association, the signs of true purity began to manifest in her, and by His own grace, Nārāyaṇa granted her the vision of His presence. In the course of time, her life came to a serene close; the messengers of Viṣṇu drew forth her soul and carried it to Vaikuṇṭha.

When the tidings reached Mālopanta that she had passed away, he thought to himself, "Who will now give her the rites that bring blessedness to the departed?" For she had belonged to the caste of the untouchables, whom neither the high-born nor the low-born would dare to touch. Mālopanta reflected deeply: "Since her misfortune befell her on account of us, it is only right that we should ensure her soul's deliverance, even though she has now gone beyond this world. We must perform her funeral rites."

Thus resolving, he entered her hut. But when he uncovered her body, lo! her limbs had transformed into fragrant flowers. Mālopanta marvelled, saying, "Such is the great power of singing the praises of Lord Viṣṇu — the Lord has here given open proof to all. In exalting His servant, the Protector of the universe only increases His own true glory."

From that time onward, the people everywhere began to honour Mālopanta, saying, "The consort of Rukmiṇī Himself stands by him and removes all great obstacles." And Mālopanta, from then on, poured the essence of compassion into his kīrtana. The devout listeners, hearing his words, would find their hearts melting in tender emotion. In his singing were all the nine flavours of devotional sentiment, yet the rasa of compassion for the soul's salvation was the highest and most moving.

It was this mood — the longing to help souls cross the ocean of worldly existence — that made him call upon the Lord with such earnestness, for he knew that in that appeal lay the key to freeing the soul. The devotee's only wish was to behold the Lord; yet even if he went into the solitude of the forest, his prayer to the Lord would ever be in the tone of compassion.

And whenever such a cry was heard, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha would hasten swiftly to that place; such is His very nature, as Śrī Vyāsa has recorded for the world. Even if a man will not sit alone in meditation, yet let him conduct his household life with ease, and then at least once in the day sit in peace for a quarter of the watch and listen to the lives of saints.

Of the nine modes of devotion to Śrī Hari, the act of listening to His glories is the highest. It was through this alone that King Parīkṣit was delivered, and countless others have found its truth confirmed.

In the next chapter, the sweet tale shall unfold, spoken in honour of Śrī Rukmiṇī's Lord, wherein the king of the earth, with fearless devotion, speaks his words of gratitude. Thus

concludes this forty-first chapter of the Bhakta-līlāmṛta, which fulfils the heart's desire simply by being heard, a chapter rich with the sweetness of saintly love.

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Chapter 42

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Lord Ganesha)

Without the grace of Shri Hari, all worldly or spiritual endeavors appear fruitless. Even if one masters all fourteen branches of knowledge, it is like a lamp without a flame. Without His mercy, even the attainment of all sixty-four arts is as useless as a puppet unable to move without its controlling strings. The Vedas, Shastras, and Puranas too, are in vain without the Lord's compassion—just as marriage without the blessing of children brings no joy of nurture.

If the poet of deep feeling for the blue-hued Lord does not invoke Him again and again, then even the gift of poetry becomes but a weary exercise of speech. But one who has no strength or skill, if devoted to Panduranga with a pure heart, will sway in love while singing His glory, and thus become adorned with noble fame. The Lord, compassionate to devotees and merciful to the meek, never considers their lineage; seeing only the strength of pure feeling, He blesses them at once.

In the earlier account, there was the tale of the great devotee Keshav Swami, and of Bajid, the steadfast Yavana, who became a valiant Vaishnava. And there was the story of Santoba Pawar, whose devotion to his Guru brought the attainment of detachment, and who, when in the distress of Malopant's plight, was granted the grace of Vaikuntha's Lord.

Now hear, O loving and noble listeners, a tale sweet to the heart and rich in devotional rasa. There was once a pious woman named Premabai, who regularly listened to the recitation of the Bhagavata Purana. She was bereft of a husband, without learning in wisdom or renunciation, but through her devotion she became united in spirit with the Lord reclining upon the serpent Shesha.

She made no distinction between her own and others', nor between friend and foe, but held the same feeling towards all beings, seeing one life in all. Her compassion extended to every creature; in hearing or singing the Lord's name she was deeply moved, and she would feed the hungry to the best of her ability. Gentle saints and Vaishnavas who came to her home were given a place of honor in her dwelling, and she engaged in the remembrance of the Lord's holy name at all times with loving enthusiasm.

Daily she would bathe in the Godavari, worship the deity of Gopala, and go to hear the learned recite the Bhagavata. Listening to the stories of Shri Hari, her eyes would brim with tears, her limbs would tremble, and she would lose all awareness of herself. In kirtan she would sit absorbed, her mind dwelling beyond the body, and thus she came to be known among devotees as Bhaktavaishnavi Premabai.

One day, some holy saints visited her home, weary and hungry. She thought within herself, "If I go to hear the Purana, I will neglect serving these saints, and thus lose all my merit. What then is the right course?" She reasoned, "If I am worshiping Vishnu and a Vaishnava comes

to my home, I must at once leave the worship and bow to them. For even if I am performing deity worship, to ignore the devotee is not pleasing to the Lord."

The scriptures declare that to honor a devotee is higher than ritual worship; even flowers offered with mantras will fall upon the Lord like stones if the heart neglects His servants. The essence is this: to be absorbed in deity worship while turning away a hungry guest is like covering one's head with fine cloth while leaving one's body naked—it is a breach of true decorum. Thus, guided by dharma, she stayed at home, leaving the Purana to serve the saints.

Yet her heart still yearned for the Purana. She thought, "The Bhagavata will surely be read in the temple today." She called her ten-year-old son and told him, "Go quickly to hear the Purana, listen to it carefully, and then come back and tell me the whole story." The boy, obedient to his mother, went to the temple, while she remained at home completing her household tasks—but all the while her mind dwelt upon the Lord's tales, as a cow grazing on a hill ever thinks of her calf, or a bird soaring high still longs for its chicks.

When the cooking was complete, she went to the riverbank where the Vaishnavas were bathing, washed their feet, and drank the water as holy tirtha. She offered them sandal paste, flowers, and fragrant garlands with loving hands, then served them food, making the offering to Krishna before feeding them. Her son, having heard the Purana, also returned at that time, and she seated him with the guests to partake of the meal.

After the meal and some rest, she called her son and said, "Now tell me the story you have heard." The boy began, "In Gokula, to Nanda and Yashoda was born Shri Krishna. One day, as Yashoda churned curds, Krishna came to her, crying and asking for her milk. She set aside her work and took Him in her arms, giving Him her breast. With delight He drank from one side, while holding the other in His tiny hand, gazing into her face.

Blessed indeed was Yashoda, for the Supreme Brahman beyond illusion, the highest Person in human form, drank milk from her in pure love. Yet in that moment Krishna thought within Himself, 'Does my mother love Me more, or does her heart still dwell upon worldly things? Let me see.' Thus He commanded the fire-god to boil the milk on the stove. The milk rose up in frothing waves, and its fragrance reached Yashoda's nose. She hastily set Krishna down, though He began to cry, and ran to save the milk—but it boiled over and was lost.

As she tried to salvage it, it seemed like a debate between the devotee's love and her worldly duty—both important, yet sometimes in conflict. Like the ocean of milk spilling away, her chance to feed Krishna in that moment was gone; like a goat tied to milk, she found the vessel emptied by another's hand; like a woman drawing water for the sacred betel-nut tree, only to have her pots taken for sweeping, she had to leave her purpose unfinished."

Once, having set aside the pearl garland she wore, Mother Yashoda went out into the meadows to churn curds, as the cool morning breeze filled the air. But in the midst of her work she saw that the pot had been left neglected, its contents wasted. In this manner,

having turned away from the Supreme Being, Shri Krishna—the very Parabrahman Himself—she had gone to attend to worldly tasks, and upon returning she found the milk overflowing and spilling away. A pang of regret stirred within her heart.

Meanwhile, Shri Krishna, perceiving all that had happened, felt a wave of indignation rise in His mind. "Is My mother's heart," He thought, "more absorbed in her worldly duties than in Me? Even while feeding Me with the nectar of her love, she turns away to her household chores. It is proper that I teach her a gentle lesson." Resolving thus, He quickly crept to the churning room, overturned the pot of freshly churned butter, and distributed the gathered butter among the calves. Then, with His own little hands, He broke all the remaining pots and vessels in the place.

In this way Krishna's mischief was at its height when Yashoda returned from outside. Beholding the world's very life-breath—the Jagajivan—lying amid spilled curds and sharing the butter with His playmates, she was seized with a deep and righteous anger. "Who else in the three worlds," she thought, "would act in this way? Children there are in every household, but none so incorrigible as this one. The women of the village often complain to me of His pranks, yet I never believed them. Now I see the truth with my own eyes."

With these thoughts, Yashoda seized a stick and strode toward Him. Seeing her approach, the Supreme Lord fled swiftly, with His mother in pursuit. At one moment He appeared before her eyes; the next, He vanished from sight, hiding behind walls and corners. The gopis laughed and called out to Yashoda, "Now you see the trouble we speak of every day!"

Yashoda's eyes darted this way and that, but Krishna slipped away at every turn. Fear of His mother's wrath made the wielder of the discus run with all His might. The sun climbed higher in the sky, the heat grew fierce, and Yashoda's strength began to wane. "If I once catch Him in my hands," she thought, "I shall never let Him go till the end of time. I will bind Him so that He cannot escape."

The Compassionate Lord, knowing His mother's heart and perceiving her weariness, decided to let Himself be caught. With a swift turn, Yashoda seized His tiny wrist. Unable to contain her indignation, she dragged Him home, the gopis gathering around and exclaiming, "Your Krishna is a thief! You never believed our words, but today you have caught Him red-handed. Now bind Him to the mortar, for nothing else will teach Him a lesson."

At their urging, Yashoda fetched a rope to tie her son to the wooden mortar. But each time she tried, the rope proved short by the measure of two fingers. She brought another piece and joined it, yet still it fell short. Rope after rope was added—so many that even the ropes from the neighbors' homes were brought—and still the length lacked two fingers.

For who could bind the Infinite, the Formless, the Unnameable One, whom even Brahma and the other gods cannot measure? He whose body holds all the universes in every pore cannot be encompassed by any cord. How can one tie the boundless sky with a small loop?

How can one weigh the earth in a balance? How can the wind be confined in a jar? Such is the folly of attempting to bind the Lord of All.

Yet Yashoda's love was steadfast. "This is my Nanda's son," she said in her heart, "and I will bind Him." Moved by the firmness of her affection, the Lord allowed the rope to be sufficient. In that very instant, the two-finger gap vanished, and Yashoda tied Him to the mortar as the gopis laughed in delight.

Bound thus, the Lord looked upon His mother with meekness and said, "I will make no more mischief. From today, I am free from all bondage to naughtiness." Tears welled in His eyes, but Yashoda, though inwardly softened, left Him there and went to attend to her household duties.

Now here a devoted woman Premabai heard the tale. Overcome with emotion, she exclaimed, "Once He was tied for overturning a pot of curds. But He is no mere child—He is my very Lord! For His sake I will free Him with my own hands." Speaking thus, she resolved to go to Gokul at once. Her love so filled her heart that she abandoned her mortal body that very moment, her soul hastening to Krishna's side.

When the Vaishnavas of the village came to her house, they found her lifeless form with a serene smile, and they said to one another, "Blessed is the devotion of Premabai! By meditating upon the form of Krishna in her heart, she has attained His eternal abode." At that moment, fresh tulsi flowers showered unexpectedly upon her, and the onlookers rejoiced with cries of "Victory to the Lord!" Her body was honored, for the day of her passing became a festival in the village, remembered for her pure and unshakable love.

Now, listen with a devoted heart to another sweet and profound tale. There once lived a virtuous maiden named Shilabai, endowed with noble qualities, born as the daughter of a royal house. In her tender years, her father entrusted her education to learned Brahmin scholars, desiring that his daughter should be trained in noble virtues and sacred learning. Under the care of the family priest, she learned to offer daily worship to the sacred Shaligram, the emblem of Lord Vishnu, and to honor her Sadguru with devotion.

One day, while engaged in worship, Shilabai spoke humbly to her teacher, "Revered one, I beg of you to grant me a Shaligram stone so that I may perform my daily worship with steadfastness." Seeing her pure and innocent desire, the priest placed before her a smooth, rounded stone from his possession and told her with affectionate authority, "This indeed is the Shaligram—worship it with faith." Her heart overflowed with joy. At once she prepared a proper seat and all the articles of worship, and, after her morning bath, she began her daily puja exactly as she had seen her teacher perform it. Though she did not know the mantras, her heart was filled with unwavering faith, and it was this love that drew the Lord Himself to her presence.

The Supreme Lord cares little for learning without devotion, but He is drawn irresistibly to the pure love of a devotee. In the lifeless stone, by the force of Shilabai's affection, the Lord revealed Himself. Day after day, she worshipped with delight, though her parents thought it but a child's play.

When Shilabai came of age, a Mandalik king sought her hand, and the marriage was arranged without delay. After the four days of wedding celebration, she went to her husband's home, taking with her the box that held her beloved Shaligram and all her puja articles. On the very first day there, she prepared for worship as usual, singing the Lord's praises while performing the aarti.

But her husband was a man without devotion. Seeing the box, he inquired and learned that it held her deity. A thought of mischief entered his mind, and without her knowing, he took the box, scattered all its contents, and cast them into the waters of a nearby river, thinking to end what he deemed a superstitious burden.

When Shilabai came after her bath to begin the puja, she found the box gone. A deep grief seized her. "Has my Lord left me?" she cried. "What sin has arisen between us, that You have abandoned me?" Resolving that life without the Lord was meaningless, she vowed to give up food and water until He returned. Her in-laws pleaded, her husband tried to console her, but she would not yield. For four days she kept her fast, her mind fixed on her Lord.

Then, in a dream, the Lord appeared to her in the very form of her family priest and placed the box before her, restoring all the articles of worship. Awakening with joy, she hastened to bathe and offer her puja as before. Her husband, seeing the restored box, was filled with astonishment and remorse. "I myself threw each article into the river," he said, "who then has gathered them back?" Realizing the power of her faith, he repented deeply and from that day became himself a devotee of the Lord.

Now listen to another charming episode. The same Mandalik king had another queen, gracious and full of virtue, who kept with love the great festivals of the Lord—on the appearance days of Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parashurama, Rama, and Krishna, she would celebrate with joy, making a cradle for the Lord, performing elaborate worship, feeding all beings, and hosting kirtans for the Vaishnavas. On each Ekadashi, she would hold night vigils to sing the holy names of the Lord.

Her husband, the king Narapal Mandalik, though outwardly indifferent to such rites, was inwardly a firm devotee. He did not perform worship publicly, nor attend kirtans, nor chant the Lord's holy name aloud; hence people criticized him, saying, "His queen is pure and devoted, but he himself is a faithless man who wastes his life." Yet in truth, not for a single moment did the remembrance of God leave his heart.

One day the queen said to him gently, "I wish that some occasion might arise to awaken in you the joy of worshipping Lord Vishnu." The king replied, "My body is bound to worldly

duties, and so I have little taste for the outward ways of devotion." Yet secretly his heart was moist with love for the Lord, though no one around him knew it.

One day, as he lay resting in the temple, half-asleep, his lips suddenly and unawares uttered the name of Rama. The queen, who was near, heard this and was overjoyed. When morning came, she began preparations for a great festival in the temple, knowing now that her husband's heart was not far from the Lord she loved.

The queen was ever devoted to the worship of Lord Vishnu, to the singing of His divine praises, and to offering gifts to worthy Brahmins with pure intention. One day, the king inquired of her, "For what reason do you perform this festival with such completeness today?" She replied, "Last night, as you lay in sleep, I heard, with full awareness, the name of Rama flow from your lips. My heart was filled with immeasurable joy, and for that reason I have arranged this festival in our home."

Hearing these words from the beautiful queen, the king reflected deeply and said, "If the name of Rama has now issued forth from this body of mine, what further need is there for me to remain in this life?" Saying thus, the noble son of kings at once gave up his life-breath. This wondrous event was witnessed by many Vaishnavas, and all came to know that the king, though outwardly reserved, had been inwardly steadfast in his devotion.

The queen, beholding the depth of her husband's faith, likewise relinquished her own life. In this way, both husband and wife attained perfection together, becoming a pair eternally united in the Lord's divine abode. Such was the certainty of their devotion—unique, firm, and radiant—that holding within their hearts the Lord of Vaikuntha, they experienced His bliss with loving surrender.

Now hear another pleasing tale. There was a maiden named Pilabai, chief among women, who daily performed the worship of Lord Vishnu without fail. Her husband passed away swiftly, and she remained in her father's home. In due course, her father too left the body, but she had two brothers who took care of her. In time, discord arose between them, and each seized a village for himself, dividing their inheritance. The younger brother, in a spirit of rivalry, gathered an army to attack the elder and plundered his village. In this raid, all of Pilabai's sacred worship articles were destroyed, and her service to the Lord was interrupted.

She, who never took food without first completing her daily vow, sent a message to her elder brother, urging him to search for the lost items. He searched diligently but could not find them, and so sent word back, asking her to come and look herself. Pilabai went at once, searching everywhere, but the sacred deity of Lord Vishnu was nowhere to be found. For five days she fasted, her resolve unwavering. Seeing her steadfastness, the Lord who bears the discus appeared to her in a dream, in the form of a Brahmin, and restored to her the worship articles with His own hands.

When this miracle became known, the younger brother was filled with remorse. He came before his elder, confessing, "I am entirely at fault. I came against you with an army, and in

my enmity I ruined the worship of the Lord, the very life of the world. In my folly I have offended the Divine." With a repentant heart, he reconciled with his elder brother. Thereafter, both of them became disciples of Pilabai, serving her with sincerity, and in that service they both attained the direct vision of the Lord.

Another sweet tale follows. There was a saintly king, foremost among rulers, deeply devoted to the service of holy men. His daughter, Ramabai, was married swiftly, but her husband was without devotion. Though she herself was a Vaishnava of pure heart, he had not even the slightest inclination toward faith in Lord Vishnu, nor did anyone in his household engage in worship or remembrance of the Lord's name. Immersed in worldly pleasures, none there gave thought to the service of saints.

Ramabai's mind was ever troubled, and she lamented, "I have fallen into the company of an unbeliever; how shall I overcome this misfortune?" She felt her father had not discerned the truth when arranging her marriage, for surely the bond was the fruit of past actions. In time, she became with child, and at the proper hour gave birth to a son. Her husband's home was filled with wealth and prosperity, yet her heart was restless. She prayed, "O merciful Lord of Vaikuntha, without You I cannot bear even a moment. My only shelter is at Your feet. When will You deliver me and show my husband the truth of Your glory?"

One day, on the sacred fast of Ekadashi, her husband brought a living creature into the house to kill it for meat. Ramabai forbade him, saying, "Today is the Lord's day, the holy Ekadashi. To take the life of any creature on this day is a sin that leads to the torments of hell." She reasoned with him in many ways, but he, fixed in his impure ways, would not listen, and without pity he killed the animal.

Her heart was wrung with grief. She thought, "How shall I bear this?" For she was like the cool, gentle moon forced to dwell alongside the burning, inauspicious Rahu. In that moment she sent a servant to the town, instructing him, "Go swiftly and see whether any Vaishnava saints have arrived, and bring me word at once." When the servant departed, Ramabai, her mind resolute, took poison, and placing her infant in the cradle, gave him to drink as well. In but a moment, the child's life was gone, and news spread swiftly through the household. Rukmiṇī-devī, the consort of Lord, arrived to the palace.

All the people of the house cried out in shock and sorrow, but the mother of the child remained serene, her mind absorbed in the remembrance of the Lord's name. The king, hearing this, said to the queen, "Your mind is indeed most firm, for you do not shed a tear. This is a wonder to me."

Then Rukmiṇī-devī, the gracious consort of the Lord, replied with gentle firmness, "Why grieve over that which is perishable? That which is destined to be destroyed in the end is but a passing illusion, like the withered fig upon the tree of Māyā."

When Śrī Hari, out of His boundless compassion, casts His merciful glance, even great obstacles dissolve in countless ways. And if a saint should arrive at one's very home, the remedy for calamity is swiftly revealed.

The king, anxious for his child, asked the queen, "Tell me quickly—what is that remedy?" She replied, "Bring a saint, wash his feet, and let the child drink the sacred water from that ablution. By that alone the boy will rise immediately."

Hearing this, the king asked, "Where can such saints be found?" Rukmiṇī replied, "They have alighted at the temple; go quickly and bring them here."

The king, his heart stirred with a mixture of wonder and hope, went forth and brought the Vaiṣṇava devotees to his palace. With reverent devotion, he personally worshipped them, offering service with his own hands. Taking the sanctified water that had washed their holy feet, he gently poured it into the child's mouth.

By the Lord's grace, the boy's life returned at once; his breath flowed again, and the slumber of death broke into wakefulness. Witnessing this extraordinary miracle, the king's heart melted into deep devotion. Abandoning all wickedness and folly, he became himself a humble Vaiṣṇava.

From that day, he daily worshipped Viṣṇu, honored the Lord's devotees, listened to the singing of His glories, and constantly repeated the holy Name. Thus was the noble determination of Queen Rukmiṇī revealed—though poison had been given and the prince slain, in the moment of peril she was protected by the Lord of Lakṣmī, who displayed a wonder beyond measure.

Now listen to another most delightful account. There was once a king named Rāmarāja, a sovereign of pure heart and deep devotion. He was a steadfast worshipper of Lord Śrī Rāma, living in the sweetness of loving remembrance. In his heart and mind dwelt the very deity of the Lord of Ayodhyā. Day and night, without ceasing, his tongue recited the Holy Name of Rāma.

Wherever the glory of Śrī Rāma was recounted, there he would sit and listen with joy. Yet, whenever the story of Sītā's abduction was spoken, sorrow would weigh heavily upon his heart, grieving for the Lord's pain in the forest. The learned reciter, knowing the king's mind, would avoid that part of the tale.

But once, a certain paṇḍit, unmindful of this, began to read from the Rāmāyaṇa and came upon the very episode of Sītā's abduction. The king's brow clouded, and turning to his minister, he commanded, "Make ready the army at once!"

At his word, the royal forces assembled swiftly, armed with every weapon, and stood ready before him. Rāmarāja declared, "Rāvaṇa has stolen away Sītā-devī. He has fled to Laṅkā. Let us march without delay and pursue him!"

Thus the king led his entire force to the shore of the sea, determined to slay the ten-headed one. Without hesitation, he entered the waters as if to cross to Laṅkā. The depth of his feeling touched the very heart of Śrī Rāma, who, perceiving his distress, appeared at once upon the shore with Sītā at His side.

The Lord spoke gently, "O Rāmarāja, here is Sītā, whom Rāvaṇa once took away. I Myself brought her back, slaying the demon. Why then do you trouble yourself to go to Laṅkā? There is no longer any cause." Hearing these words, the king's heart found peace. He came forth from the waters and offered worship to the Life of Sītā.

Herein lies the true sign of attaining the Lord—steadfast resolution, unwavering in the cause of devotion. And in this matter, O noble-hearted listeners, there is a further tale to hear.

There was a certain man, a servant of Hari, who was firmly established in devotion to Lord Jagannātha. He engaged in bhajan with great love, fixing his mind entirely upon the Lord's form… Within him shone, in their fullness, all the sixty-four divine arts and perfections. Countless were the incarnations of Śrī Hari that he could assume, each taken on with the sole intent of delighting in the Lord's own līlā and serving the cause of divine love. By the weight of the Lord's own grace, he would experience direct vision of the Supreme, and—donning various guises—he would manifest wondrous episodes of the avatāras before all.

In the company of dear friends and Vaiṣṇava devotees, amid song and the melody of instruments, he would enact these pastimes with such grace that those who beheld them were left in amazement. One day, he took on the form of the ferocious Narasiṃha. Fashioning another as Hiraṇyakaśipu, he burst forth from a pillar, as if from solid stone, just as the Lord had once done in the age of old when called upon by Prahlāda's remembrance. With a thunderous leap, he seized the mock Hiraṇyakaśipu, cast him down, and in a roar of might tore open his chest with his claws, drawing forth the entrails and placing them around his neck, until the onlookers—half in awe, half in terror—cried out in tumult.

Another time, he would play out marvels as if they were before one's very eyes—the mighty Airāvata sinking in the shimmering waters of a mirage; an army, born only of dream, bringing real victory to a king; Agastya Muni drinking in an entire river; a mountain shattered in an instant by a mere wooden bolt; the serpent of a rope striking King Parīkṣit; the monkey-hero hurling a rock to swallow the sun; or the burning of Khāṇḍava forest by the fire disguised as a painted blaze.

So too, on that day, a wondrous enactment unfolded. Some among the people murmured that it was the reawakening of enmity from a former birth—that this was why such a guise had been assumed, and why a life had been taken so swiftly. The fallen body lay still, none close to him remaining, and his companions carried the news to the king, recounting from beginning to end the whole occurrence. The king, hearing all, declared, "Perform the final

rites for this man; the feud between us is now concluded." Thus was his soul given peaceful passage.

But the brothers of the departed now resolved to take revenge on Narahari. They approached the king, seeking his aid, and the king, devising a stratagem, asked Narahari to once again assume a disguise. He agreed, and took the form of King Daśaratha. With craft, the king arranged that Narahari should enact the story in which the marvel of Rāma's exile would be displayed.

He fashioned two fair youths as Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, and a woman of fierce countenance as Kaikeyī, the queen whose crooked mind brought sorrow to Ayodhyā. Amid song, instruments, and the Haridāsa's kīrtan, the Bālakāṇḍa of Vālmīki was recalled in loving detail. Seated upon the throne of fortune, Raghunātha listened as Kaikeyī, turning to Daśaratha, reminded him of the boons he had once promised her. "I ask only this," she said, "that Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa be sent to the forest, and my son Bharata be placed upon the throne."

Hearing her mind, Rāma prepared to depart for exile, and the one who wore Daśaratha's guise now gave vent to cries of grief, pleading, "Take the kingdom if you will, but send not my Raghunātha away to the forest!" Yet Rāma, bowing to his father and readying himself with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, departed toward the woods.

Seeing him go, the one in Daśaratha's form fell to the ground in lamentation: "Śrī Rāma, my very life! My hidden treasure! My sole repose! Thou leavest me now. Without Thee, the ten directions are empty before my eyes. My own soul is Śrī Rāma Himself, yet Kaikeyī's wrath has brought a curse upon me. In this world, apart from Thee, I have no kin—no parents, no brethren, no sisters. Hearing Kaikeyī's cruel words, Thou hast gone forth to the forest. When shall my eyes behold Thee again? O Rāma, life of my life, what is left to me now but to cast away this mortal breath?"

Uttering thus, he ended the play by falling lifeless, and when the people came near, no breath returned to his body. His limbs were cold, and all said, "Holding the form of Śrī Rāma in his heart, he has attained sāyujya-mukti." Never before had a drama been brought to such an end before their very eyes. The Vaiṣṇavas and saints showered flowers in reverence.

For such is the way of the world—when saints dwell among men, they are met with doubt and even slander; yet when they depart, all heap them with praise.

O know this Bhakta Līlāmṛta to be like the ocean of milk itself. Here dwells the Lord of Lakṣmī, the God of gods, the very support of all worlds, the Ananta-śāyin, whose virtues are boundless beyond measure. Kings themselves are his servants, singing his holy qualities in praise. Blessed indeed is the hearing of Bhakta Līlāmṛta, which fulfils the heart's desire; and this forty-second chapter, rich in sweetness, is a nectar for the loving devotee.

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Chapter 43

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ.

In the vast expanse of the sky, even the fiercest winds may at times be restrained; the creeping vine too can be checked in its growth. Yet, when one turns to behold the divine deeds of Śrī Hari, no shore nor limit can ever be found. One might attempt to number the jars of water held in the ocean, yet who can measure the treasury of the devotees' lives and deeds? The tender shoots of grass upon the earth may be quickly gathered into a heap, yet the end of the saints' glories none can perceive—for the Inner Witness Himself reveals their measureless nature. With the guidance of poets of old, I, though dull of mind, make bold to narrate; it is not through my own intellect, but by the very prompting of the Lord within the heart. As a blind man, hearing the call of the seeing one, gropes and makes his way, so is this composition humbly offered, trusting in the grace of the noble-hearted to receive it.

Śrī Viṭṭhāla, the Lord dwelling on the banks of the Bhīma, delights in the stories of His saints. He has made me a mere instrument, and He Himself, the lotus-eyed, speaks. Just as He once held aloft Govardhana upon His fingertips to honor the cowherds, so does He uphold the purpose of this sacred chronicle, He who is all-wise and all-knowing.

In the previous chapter was told the deep tale of how Śrī Kṛṣṇa was bound by Yaśodā's love, and how Premābāī, beholding the Lord's form with attributes, gave up her life; and how Śiḷābāī, Pilābāī, and Rāmābāī, seeing the steadfastness of their resolve, attained unto the couch of Śeṣa. When Sītā's abduction was heard, Rāmarāja leapt into the sea, eager to rescue her; and Narahari, moved by the guise of Daśaratha's son, gave up his dwelling without a thought.

Now, there was one Bōgarāsā, wise and deeply devoted, whose heart was absorbed in loving worship. His wife, a most virtuous and faithful lady, understood the mind of her husband, and together they served the saints with pure intent, casting away all delusion and worldly attachment. He saw the one Self in all beings, regarding the whole universe as his very own self, and ever lived in the discrimination born of such vision.

With constant remembrance of the holy names "Śrī Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Hari, Govinda" upon his lips, they endured want of food and clothing, yet never forsook the quality of goodness. Though their household was humble, they daily fed ten men, nurturing their store of merit by their righteous conduct.

One day, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, wishing to behold their steadfastness, came to their home in the form of a saint. Entering the courtyard, He asked the mistress of the house, "Where is Bōgarāsā? I have come to meet him." She replied, "He has gone to the market." The Lord seated Himself, receiving her respectful greeting, and said, "Your husband will return soon,

but I am very hungry. Having heard of your good repute—that you feed the hungry with love—I have come to be satisfied. Now, prepare food for Me at once."

But in the house there was not a grain to be found. She thought within herself, "If I keep Him fasting, it will lessen my husband's merit." Then, taking the gold nose-ring from her nostril, she went to the goldsmith, sold it, and with the price bought the necessary provisions. Returning quickly, she cooked with devotion, and when the meal was ready, she served it to the saintly guest.

Unbeknownst to her, this was the Lord of the universe Himself, in the guise of a Vaiṣṇava, partaking of her food as He would in the most sacred sacrifice. "I have been hungry for many days," He said, "but today my belly is full." The Husband of Rukmiṇī ate all that had been prepared, then washed His hands and took the offered leaf-cup of water, while she gave Him a sprig of holy basil for mouth purification. Though no food remained for her, her heart was full of contentment.

Perceiving her pure intent, the Lord was pleased. Entering the inner room of the house, He buried in the earth a pot with His own hands, saying, "This pot is full of treasure. Whenever you have need, take from it, and whenever saints come to your house, spend freely upon them." Having thus spoken, He vanished from sight.

When Bōgarāsā returned from the market, his wife told him what had happened—that a saint had come, that she had sold her nose-ring to feed him, and that before departing he had buried a pot in their home. "He told me," she said, "that from it we might take whatever we need for the service of saints." Hearing this, Bōgarāsā was astonished. "This was no ordinary saint," he said, "but the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha Himself! How did you fail to recognize Him? I, for your sake, was granted His vision earlier; now I cannot bear to live without Him."

His heart choked with emotion, he offered praises: "All glory to You, O Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, sole pervader of the three worlds! For the sake of Your devotees, You take countless forms. Today, as a hungry guest, You have blessed my eyes. Beholding the love of Your true servant, You appeared at once, dark-hued, four-armed, holding conch and discus, clad in divine yellow silk, adorned with fish-shaped earrings and a garland of tulasī. Such beauty shone from Your countenance that I bowed again and again."

Worshipping the Lord with the rites of love, he offered Him food as to an honored guest, and then the Lord withdrew into the temple of His devotee's heart. From that time forth, the Vaiṣṇavas dined daily in his home by the hundreds, and another blissful devotee, complete in the Rāmānanda tradition, sang the names of the Lord without ceasing.

Seeing all creation as his own Self, he knew no trace of duality, even in dream. Many, receiving his grace, were stirred to devotion, worshipping with love in proper form. To one disciple he gave the task of seeking alms in the town; each day that disciple would bring a measure of flour and place it before the guru. By the grace of the Lord, from that little, a

hundred brāhmaṇas were fed each day, and in such manner many days passed until the divine will brought that service to its destined close.

One day, the revered sannyāsī, Rāmānanda Svāmī, arrived in a certain city, accompanied by his entire assembly of disciples. Among them was a devout follower named Hari Ānanda, whose own disciple, with humble heart, moved through the city seeking alms. When his rounds were completed, the disciple would always come to the encampment of Rāmānanda, bowing before him with reverence.

Upon seeing him, Rāmānanda Svāmī said to those around him, "This is a worthy disciple of the noble Hari Ānanda—ever steadfast in the service of his guru and in devotion to the Lord. Yet alas, his span of life is short. Mark my words: on the third watch after sunrise tomorrow, death shall surely claim him."

The disciple, overhearing this prophecy, felt a deep stir of fear within his heart. He went straight to his own guru and related all that had transpired. "I bowed before Rāmānanda Svāmī," he said, "and upon beholding me, he spoke—judging by the marks of my body—that I would depart from this world on the morrow, in the third watch of the day."

Hearing this, grief overcame him. "So it is my misfortune," he thought, "that my life should be so short. I have rendered no true service to my guru—what now is to be done?" His mind was heavy with longing to serve, and his eyes overflowed with tears.

Perceiving his disciple's sorrow, Hari Ānanda placed his hand in blessing and said with compassion, "By the grace of Śrī Hari, the blow of death shall be turned aside. Why do you let yourself be tormented by such fear?"

When the night had passed and the destined day had dawned, Hari Ānanda performed his ritual bath and daily observances. Then he seated his disciple directly behind him and brought before the eye of his meditation the Supreme Lord of Vaikuṇṭha. He held the saguna form—dark as a raincloud, soft in beauty, with lotus eyes, clad in radiant yellow silk—in the innermost chamber of his heart. Four-armed was that form, bearing conch and discus, adorned with the Kaustubha gem and the vanamālā garland, marked with Śrīvatsa upon the chest, with arms long enough to reach the knees, standing with perfect grace. So vividly did the Lord stand before him that Hari Ānanda lost all awareness of body or world.

At that very time, the messengers of Death came suddenly to claim the disciple. But where the unity of saint and Lord abides, Death cannot easily enter. Even as the Sudarśana discus can cut through all, yet here it met with unyielding resistance. For a full watch they lingered, unable to take the disciple, and at last they withdrew in defeat.

When the danger had passed, the disciple—now certain that his appointed hour of death had slipped away—approached his master's feet and bowed deeply. The next day, taking his begging bowl, he resumed his rounds.

When Rāmānanda Svāmī beheld him alive, his heart was filled with wonder. “How have you escaped such peril?” he asked. The disciple told the whole story, and soon Rāmānanda himself came to Hari Ānanda’s āśrama. With devotion they greeted one another, and Rāmānanda said, “By the strength of yogic concentration, a man may delay his own appointed time; but to save another from the hand of death—that power I do not possess.”

Hari Ānanda replied, “This, O Svāmī, is the glory of your grace.” Thereafter Rāmānanda departed to his own abode, ever engaged in the worship of the Supreme Lord.

Thus is the greatness of saguna-bhakti declared: the Lord of Rukmiṇī will never allow even the smallest want to remain in the heart that hungers for devotion.

Now listen to another wondrous account. On the banks of the river Tāpi lies the village of Amalāl, where there once lived a Vaiṣṇava devotee named Rāmacandra Bhaṭṭa. His heart was ever absorbed in the worship of Śrī Hari. Though he was not learned in the Vedas or Śāstras, he possessed perfect detachment. Gold and earth, jewels and stones—these appeared to him all alike. Desire never arose in his heart.

In his home, the sacred fires were tended and the deities worshipped; the food obtained by alms was what he ate. He was the royal preceptor, yet he never sought the king’s dwelling.

One day, the queen wished to offer him a gift of jewels. She summoned the wife of Rāmacandra Bhaṭṭa to the palace and presented her with ornaments set with precious gems, saying, “Do not refuse these.”

When the wife returned home wearing the ornaments, her husband saw them and spoke with sternness: “Why have you brought this burden into our house? If your mind has fixed itself upon such gain, then Śrī Hari will withdraw from us.”

Hearing this, she at once removed the jewels and cast them into the sacrificial fire, which was already blazing. Freed of this taint, she brought joy to her husband’s heart.

The tale soon reached the king, who came himself and urged, “Those ornaments we gave you—return them at once.” Realizing the great gravity of the matter, Rāmacandra Bhaṭṭa invoked Lord Nārāyaṇa with fervent praise. Then, from the very fire into which they had been thrown, the ornaments emerged unharmed, the gems and pearls shining as before.

At this marvel, the king fell at the devotee’s feet. But Rāmacandra Bhaṭṭa refused to take back what had been once given, saying, “A gift once made is never reclaimed.” The ornaments were then divided among the mendicants, and Rāmacandra Bhaṭṭa returned to his serene, desireless life, absorbed in the love of Śrī Hari.

Now hear also of another remarkable soul. In the city of Amdāvāda there lived a devotee called Suhāgshāh. By birth he was a eunuch, yet in heart he was wholly bound to the form of the Lord. His gaze never wandered toward men or women; his mind dwelt only upon the

four-armed Lord, clothed in yellow silk, holding conch and discus, whose beautiful face brought peace to his heart.

This Lord—rest of all beings, teacher of the worlds, soul of the soul—when remembered by name, instantly lifted the burden of worldly sorrow. Whether man, woman, eunuch, or one of any other state, to all alike He is the one Supreme Master of Vaikuṇṭha.

Dwelling ever in all bodies, untouched by the actions of any, the Lord, consort of Lakṣmī and reposer upon Śeṣa, was the sole meditation of Suhāgshāh's life. Though processions might pass through the city, he would not join them; instead he remained at home, the remembrance of Śrī Hari ever shining in his heart.

While wandering beyond the household, one's eyes may fall upon many men, and the mind, thus distracted, may rush toward them, inflamed with desire. Therefore, keeping the mind collected, one should engage constantly in the remembrance of the Divine Name. Even if the mind be stirred by longing or by enmity, let it be turned toward meditation, for such intense concentration, whatever its cause, is a great and rare fortune. Perceiving this sincerity of heart, the Lord grants His vision, appearing before the devotee in His beautiful, manifest form. Such a one beholds Him always and carries His deity lovingly hidden in the jewel-casket of the heart, as one might place a morsel of food tenderly within.

It came to pass one day that in that region a great drought fell, and living beings began to meet the house of death, for there was no food to be found. All looked anxiously toward the sky, wondering when the clouds would bring rain, as the thirsty chātaka bird longs for a drop from heaven.

In the city, the ruling king undertook sacred rites for the sake of rainfall. As the days passed, he observed a seven-day fast, and then the Lord of the universe appeared to him in a dream. Lord Viṣṇu, the beloved of Lakṣmī and sovereign of all the gods, came in the guise of a brāhmaṇa and spoke: "In this town dwells My resolute devotee, Suhāgśā, in the house of the eunuchs. With steadfast devotion he has bound Me, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, to his will. Therefore, O king, abandon pride, humble your heart, go to him for refuge, and offer your full prostrations. When the protector of the world is thus pleased, He will send rain upon the earth—this you may hold as certain. But if you retain even a trace of ego, not a drop will fall."

The king awoke, pondering deeply, and declared before the assembly, "During my austerities, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha appeared to me in a dream, clothed as a brāhmaṇa. He instructed me to honor Suhāgśā, the eunuch, dwelling in our city. Only then will the rains come. If I act with pride, the clouds will withhold their showers. What counsel do you give?"

The nobles and citizens, hearing of the grievous drought, urged him to follow the dream's command. So, with his household and retinue, the king went to the dwelling of Suhāgśā. At the appointed moment, he spoke: "In the night I saw you in a dream. If you grant your

blessing, the clouds will pour forth rain at once. Have mercy upon your people and hear my plea."

Suhāgśā, touched by the king's humility, returned the greeting and prostrated. Then, with a troubled heart, he spoke: "O Lord of men, why heap such honor upon me? Among all creatures I am of low station and without merit. Why should You show me such grace? I know not the reason."

Nevertheless, he went forth into the courtyard, gazing upward—but the clouds did not yet gather. Closing his eyes, he fixed his mind upon the four-armed, dark-hued Lord Viṣṇu, the ocean of mercy and savior of the three worlds. Lifting his voice, he sang: "Hail, hail, O Compassionate One! Lover of Thy devotees, ocean of grace, friend of the forsaken, deliverer of the afflicted, Supreme Lord, Primordial Person! Why, having given the king such a vision, dost Thou now withhold Thy favor? Reveal Thy mercy at once!"

But when even after his praises the rain did not come, his mind grew stern. "From this day," he declared, "I shall have no love for You at all. I cast away the nose-ring of my fidelity, and with my bangles I shall strike and break!" Seeing the depth of his resolve, the Deliverer of the world immediately came to his aid. The clouds burst forth, and rain fell in torrents.

The long famine was ended; for fourteen days and nights the heavens poured without ceasing. In gratitude, the king returned to Suhāgśā, offering to grant any request. The devotee replied, "I desire nothing. Gold and earth are alike to me. My joy lies in meditation upon Śrī Hari, at whose feet all powers are but maidservants. What could man give me that compares to Him?"

He added, "The Lord gave you this vision and increased my renown. Now, by His will, I shall abandon this perishable body." The king consented, and a pit was dug. Standing within, Suhāgśā fixed his mind on Lord Viṣṇu. The dark, lotus-eyed Lord appeared before him, embracing His servant. Suhāgśā entered into samādhi, and at that very moment flowers rained down in the city.

The people gathered, some beating cymbals, some playing the mṛdaṅga, and the Vaiṣṇavas sang of the Lord's glory. Suhāgśā spoke to them: "Accept from me the vow I have taken, and your worldly suffering shall cease." But because of his outward form, many shrank away. Only a poor, helpless soul came forward, fell at his feet, and prayed, "Have mercy upon me; deliver me from this ocean of worldly bondage." Perceiving his sincerity, Suhāgśā whispered the mantra of worship into his ear, adorned his hand with the bangles, and placed upon his nose the ring of the lineage. That tradition continues even to this day.

Thus did Lord Hari increase the fame of His servant, showing Himself as the true friend of the humble. He regards not caste or family, nor the limits of time or place, but comes at once to His devotee.

Beyond this, there are yet many sweet and wondrous episodes of saints. Listen with devotion to another. In the land of Gujarat, there lived a saint named Panhājī, born of the noble Rājput lineage. In the village of Vāsāvde near Dungarpur he was born, the beloved son of Khumānsingh, a prince of that region. From his early days, Panhājī became a devoted servant, faithful and trustworthy, ever dwelling day and night near his sovereign, never leaving his side.

For the sake of protecting his family, he took part in worldly duties, but all the while his heart remained fixed upon devotion. Constantly serving the king with loyalty, he inwardly contemplated the enchanting form of the Lord of Dvārakā. At every moment he remembered the holy name, never allowing falsehood to pass his lips. Thus, as many days and years passed, by the Lord's grace, he was blessed with divine vision.

Once, during the festival of lamps on the night of Dīpāvalī new moon, Panhājī performed the celebration with great splendor. As midnight passed, he retired to his palace to rest. But at that very time, Panhājī beheld a wondrous sight. Rising swiftly, he took a burning torch in his hand and began to rub and extinguish it with great urgency. The king, seeing this strange action, questioned him at once: "Panhājī, why are you rubbing that torch so frantically? Tell me truthfully the reason for this unusual act."

The devotee humbly replied, "O master, I am a Vaiṣṇava. Even now, at this very moment in Dvārakā, the lamps of the festival are being offered to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. But a calamity occurred there most unexpectedly. Hear what has happened: the pūjārī, adorning the Lord's deity, had placed upon Him many garments and ornaments. Because of this, when the camphor lamp was waved, the flame caught upon the Lord's silken robe, and fire broke out. From here, I beheld it with my own eyes. Therefore, I strove with my own hands to extinguish it."

Hearing this wondrous narration, the king was deeply astonished. He again questioned Paṇhāji, "Tell me at once, in what manner were the Lord's garments that day? I wish to know this in detail, so that I may have proof of your vision." Paṇhāji answered, "On that occasion the Lord was adorned in green raiment. To my sight, His deity appeared thus, resplendent in beauty."

Now, the king of Rābḍā had as his closest friend a certain Khumāna-siṅgh. The king sent him a letter by his own trusted servant, saying, "On the night of Dīpāvalī, find out what occurred in the Krishna temple at Dvārakā. Was there any mishap? Send me full details. How did the priests serve the Lord that day? Of what colour were His garments? Record all and send it to me."

In due time, Khumāna-siṅgh dispatched the messenger with the written account. The king of Rābḍā, reading it, learned that indeed on the day of Dīpāvalī, during the grand Dīpōtsava, when half the night had passed, the camphor ārati was lit before the Lord. The Lord was adorned in rich green attire, and as the flame circled about His waist-cloth, it caught fire. At

that moment, Paṇhāji the Rājpūt was standing nearby in the temple, and, with his own hands, he promptly smothered the flame.

When the letter's testimony matched Paṇhāji's account, the king regarded it as a divine marvel. He went at once to Paṇhāji, bowed before him with true reverence, and said, "You are a realised devotee of Lord Viṣṇu. I have now witnessed proof of your spiritual vision. Yet it would not be proper to keep you engaged in my personal service. You belong wholly to the service of the Saccidānanda who dwells at Dvārakā. Therefore, I grant you two villages for your household maintenance."

Thus Paṇhāji, ever devoted, renounced the king's employment and took up residence in Dvārakā, worshipping the Lord with undivided love.

At that time, there was also another ruler named Jayamalla, a great Vaiṣṇava warrior dwelling at Meḍatyā. He worshipped Lord Viṣṇu with deep devotion, performing every form of ritual service. For one prahara each day, he would sit in solitude before the Lord's deity, having given strict orders that no one should disturb him. Out of fear of the king, no one dared enter the temple during that time. After completing the full pūjā with all offerings, he would emerge.

He constantly uttered the Lord's name "Sāvaḷā" again and again. But the king's younger brother, coveting a share in the rule, became displeased when he was not included, and in anger went away to a distant place. There, he gathered a large army and advanced upon Meḍatyā. Learning the exact time of Jayamalla's daily worship, he planned to attack then.

While Jayamalla was absorbed in pūjā, the enemy's forces clashed fiercely with his chief commander. Unable to withstand them, the commander fled and came before the queen mother, reporting the danger: "The enemy's forces are vast—what course should we now take? If we tell the king, he will not leave his worship of Lord Viṣṇu."

Hearing this, the queen mother herself entered the temple and informed Jayamalla of the peril. "What shall we do now?" she asked. But Jayamalla, absorbed in worship, gave her no reply. Only calling out "Sāvaḷā" (the Dark-hued Lord), he uttered, "The Lord of the worlds knows what is to be done."

Indeed, the thought had already arisen in the Lord's own heart. Resolving to accomplish the work Himself, He assumed His visible, majestic form as the discus-bearing Lord, mounted upon His divine steed, and rode forth. The city gates were thrown open; Śrī Sārṅgadhara galloped out and engaged the enemy in terrible battle. The opposing army was utterly routed.

From the outskirts of the town, the townsfolk beheld the scene in awe, saying, "Who is this, who has put the enemy to complete flight?"

Chakradhārī, the wielder of the divine discus, swiftly bound Jayamalla's brother with strong bonds, even as he himself vanished in that very instant, leaving behind the gift of supreme liberation. Later, after offering worship to Lord Viṣṇu, Jayamalla returned and reported to the chief minister the entire incident. He said, "A divine person, radiant and noble, came in a human form. Engaging in a mighty battle with me, he routed my entire army and then captured your brother alive, bringing him here bound."

Hearing this, the king was filled with astonishment. In his heart he thought, "Surely this is the doing of the dark-hued Lord. Because of me, on this very day, the wielder of the discus must have laboured so much." He then praised the Lord of the universe with his own lips, saying, "You have indeed granted direct vision of Yourself to my brother. What offense have I committed against You, that You should thus reveal Yourself?" Out of reverence, he undertook a fast for five days.

Seeing the king's firm devotion, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha appeared before him in manifest form. Then the king's brother, deeply repentant, confessed, "I have waged enmity against you in vain." Jayamalla freed his brother, honouring him with garments and gifts, saying, "You are most fortunate, for you have met the Lord Hṛṣīkeśa face to face." Casting aside all hostility, the king's brother from then on dedicated himself to serving the devotees of Viṣṇu. Indeed, unless one comes to sit in the warmth of that holy company, the heart cannot know true repentance.

Now, listen with devotion to another sweet account of the saints. There was a certain brāhmaṇa named Śrīdhar Paṇṭ, a man of perfect faith and sincerity. He was guileless, loving, and ever devoted to bhajan. His wife too was pure in mind. Upon such a couple, the deep-blue Lord showered His grace.

Even when others joked or teased him, Śrīdhar would take their words as truth, such was his simplicity. Once, taking his wife with him, he set out on pilgrimage. Seating her upon a horse, he himself led it swiftly forward. He carried with him the household savings for expenses. Soon, however, the road led them deep into a thick forest.

There, a band of thieves surrounded them, moving alongside with cunning speed. A great fear arose in Śrīdhar's heart, and his wife spoke, "The sun is setting, and the wilderness grows lonely and empty. My heart is filled with dread—let us turn back at once."

Disguised as merchants, the thieves addressed Śrīdhar, "Why should you fear, when we are with you?" He replied, "We have no trust in your words. If you can give some proof at this moment, then indeed all fear will vanish."

The thieves answered, "Between you and us stands the Supreme Lord, the Soul of all souls, the God of gods, the Supreme Person. He relieves the toil of His devotees." Speaking thus, they feigned piety, and the couple, trusting their words, proceeded along the path.

But the evil-hearted men, having spoken of the highest truth, now treacherously revealed their cruelty. With wicked intent, they bewitched Śrīdhar and in that very moment took his life, severing his head. They seized his possessions along with his wife and began to lead her away.

Soon she learned what had happened and, at every step, turned her gaze behind her. The thieves mocked her, saying, "We have slain your husband—why do you keep looking back? Tell us quickly the reason."

The virtuous lady replied, "Between you and us stands indeed the Lord of Ayodhyā, Rāma. My heart is fixed upon Him. If the one in whom I have placed my trust could not save my husband from death, then I wish to see with my own eyes whether that Rāma will come to us or not. The indwelling Witness, the Conscious Self present in all beings, is the Lord of Ayodhyā, the husband of Janakī. It is for Him that I watch. He who slew the ten-headed Rāvaṇa and freed the gods from bondage—surely that Protector of His devotees, the Giver of liberation, will come. He who has taken countless incarnations to aid His devotees—has He now forgotten me?"

Even as she spoke, that noble lady beheld Śrī Rāma Himself manifested before her, holding bow and arrows in hand. The Lord slew the thieves then and there. Going to where her husband's lifeless body lay, Raghunātha gazed upon it with His nectar-like glance and, with His own hands, raised him to life.

Until they reached the main road, Rāma walked with them, ensuring a safe and easy journey. Then, unseen, the Lord vanished from their sight. For the sake of His devotees, the Lord assumes countless forms, wielding mace and discus to destroy the wicked.

That Achyuta, the Infinite Śrī Hari, displays His divine exploits in manifold ways. The king of the land, grateful for the Lord's protection, inscribed His noble deeds upon the scrolls of everlasting fame.

Thus concludes the sweet forty-third chapter of the sacred Śrī Bhakta Līlāmṛta, which in its mere hearing fulfils the devotee's heart's desires.

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Chapter 44

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ.

In the sacred assembly of kīrtan, the holy rivers themselves seemed to arrive, drawn by pure love for the Lord's praises. Godā, Yamunā, Sarasvatī, Kṛṣṇā, Tuṅgabhadrā, and Bhāgīrathī were present, as were Candrabhāgā and Bhīmarathī, flowing in the realm of devotion. Tāpi, Mahī, Praharā, Narmadā, Gomati, Veṇyā, and Nirā came as well; and there were the sanctified waters of Kakudmī Tīrtha, Puṣkara, and Kuśāvarta, beloved of Lord Śaṅkara. From the heavens descended the Mandākinī, the celestial Gaṅgā of the gods, while from the nether realms came Bhogāvatī, the subterranean stream. All these sacred rivers, with their auspiciousness magnified by the holy times of festival, joined in the Lord's praise, purified and resplendent in the current of devotion. And yet, these were but a few among the countless tīrthas spread across the earth, each renowned in Purāṇic lore. It is said that when the tales of the Lord's devotees are recited, these holy places themselves appear swiftly at that very spot. When a heart is filled with yearning and sits humbly before the saints to hear, in that moment the fruit of bathing in all the sacred waters is attained.

Thus, at the close of the preceding episode—when thieves had assailed Śrīdhar in the company of his consort—Lord Rāmacandra Himself appeared suddenly before their eyes. Bow in hand, the vanquisher of evil smote the wicked robbers, and by His own mercy restored Śrīdhar to life.

Now hear another account, full of sweetness. There was once a wealthy Vaiṣṇava named Haripāl. His devotion to the saints was deep and sincere; he revered them as the very embodiment of God, while regarding all other beings as ordinary souls. When Vaiṣṇava devotees entered his city, he would hasten to greet them, bowing low and escorting them to his home. There he would offer worship with all due honors, serve them lovingly with food to their heart's content, and, according to his means, present garments, ornaments, and adornments.

In time, his store of wealth diminished, yet his heart would not abandon this service. He pondered deeply, thinking, "What means shall I find to continue this sacred duty?" Hearing of his past fame as a generous benefactor, many saints would still come to him; yet if he turned them away, he felt it would wound their hearts and diminish his own virtue.

Thus he conceived a strange resolve: he took to the forest in the guise of a robber, bow in hand, and waylaid travellers upon the road. He would frighten them and seize their wealth—but never would he take a life. His heart was steeped in compassion. When a saint appeared, he would never trouble him; but from other travellers he would take all possessions. In his mind he thought, "By this means I shall gain the merit of serving the saints with what I have taken."

Many years passed in this manner until, one day, a band of saints arrived at his home. Alas, there was no food in his storehouse. Distressed, he went into the forest with bow and arrow, but not a single traveller passed that way. Troubled in mind, he prayed inwardly for a way to feed the holy ones.

Then the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, desiring to show His sport, came before him in the form of a wealthy merchant named Sāraṅgadhara, seated upon a cart beside the beautiful Rukmiṇī. Seeing them, Haripāl's heart leapt; stringing his bow, he barred their way and demanded, "Give up all your gold and goods, else I shall take your life at once!" The Lord feigned fear, offering up garments, ornaments, and all wealth, which Haripāl accepted. Even the ornaments of Rukmiṇī were removed. Then, without delay, Haripāl returned to his home, adorned the saints, and served them a sumptuous feast.

Meanwhile, Rukmiṇī turned to the Lord and said, "Your devotee has robbed me of all my adornments—what shall be done?" The Lord replied, "Has he not preserved our lives? Count this as a service, for it is for the sake of the saints." But Rukmiṇī wished to see for herself how this devotee served the holy.

So the Lord assumed the dress of a saint, tulasī beads upon His neck, gopī-candana upon His brow, while Rukmiṇī clothed herself as a renunciant. Together they came to Haripāl's door, chanting "Sītārām!" The moment he beheld them, Haripāl fell prostrate, offered them seats, worshipped them with devotion, and served them food. When they were satisfied, he joyfully declared, "Blessed is this day! Tell me, what other wish have you, that I may fulfill it?"

Then the Lord, still in disguise, said, "As we came to meet you, a robber waylaid us and took all our wealth." Haripāl at once vowed, "I shall seek him in the forest and take his life for daring to trouble the saints!" But at that moment, the Lord cast aside the guise of the merchant, revealing Himself in His four-armed form. Overcome with shame and repentance, Haripāl wept and confessed, "Lord of Rukmiṇī, I knew not that it was You whom I robbed. Forgive my great offence!"

The Lord, smiling, replied, "Your heart is fixed in the service of My saints; therefore I am well pleased with you. From this day forward, all prosperity shall attend your home, so that you may serve the devotees without hindrance." Saying this, He vanished from sight, leaving Haripāl to continue his sacred service in joy and abundance.

Engaged in the work of the fields, he trusted that the Lord Himself would maintain his welfare and provision. If ever he saw the hungry, he would offer them food according to his means.

Once, he had two sturdy bullocks for his farming. But one night, thieves stole them away. In this sudden misfortune, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha Himself brought forth new bullocks for him. The thieves, unaware of this divine intervention, drove the stolen pair into another field. When the owner came calling them by name, the thieves watched in astonishment as the animals responded and followed him.

They stole the bullocks again the next night, and again Śrīpati, the Lord, created another pair for His devotee. The thieves grew bewildered in mind, for this happened not once, but four times in the same manner.

At last, deep remorse entered their hearts. They said to one another, "This man must have the protection of the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha. We have only brought harm to ourselves and sought the path to hell through this deceit." Thus resolved, they came before the devotee, fell at his feet, and confessed all that had happened, carrying genuine repentance in their souls.

With a single-minded spirit, they took refuge in him and received his grace. From that time, they served day and night, absorbed in the remembrance of Viṣṇu.

Among the relishable tales of the saints, another story is told of a devout soul named Dhanājāṭa, a humble peasant. In his childhood, when a group of Vaiṣṇavas visited his home for worship, he witnessed their deity service and offered them prostrate salutations. Folding his hands, he said, "Please give me a Śālagrāma stone for worship."

Seeing his eagerness, they placed a small black stone in his hands, which he accepted with complete faith. From that day, Dhanājāṭa worshipped it daily with pure devotion. The Lord Śrīhari, delighted with this love, manifested Himself there in the boy's home.

When tending the cows in the forest, he would carry the Śālagrāma with him. After bathing in the river, he would offer wildflowers and prepare a meal from his lunch bundle, inviting the Lord with the words, "O Hṛṣīkeśa, partake of this now." Pleased with the sincerity of his devotion, the Lord would eat the bread with relish. Dhanājāṭa, his heart content, would then eat the remainder himself.

From childhood, the Supreme Lord had become his closest friend. They would not part from each other, enjoying the bliss of loving companionship. As he grew older, Dhanājāṭa's renown as a steadfast Vaiṣṇava increased. Whenever wandering ascetics came hungry, he would feed them with honor.

One day, as he set out to sow his field, he met many vairāgīs along the path, chanting "Sītārāma" with their lips. They said to him, "We have heard of your great charity in feeding Vaiṣṇavas, especially now, when famine is heavy and no other giver remains in the town. Feed us now and give satisfaction to the servants of Viṣṇu."

Hearing this, Dhanājāṭa reflected—there was no grain left in his home. Yet he resolved quickly upon a plan: he would grind his seed grain into flour and feed the saints at once. Returning home, he ground the wheat and prepared a meal for them. The satisfied devotees blessed him, saying, "May the Lord of all, consort of Rukmiṇī, ever aid you. May your store never fail, and may your good fame spread far."

The saints departed for their pilgrimages, and Dhanājāṭa's heart overflowed with joy. The people of the village, however, spoke ill of him, saying, "What he has done is unprecedented—feeding saints at the cost of his own farming. This will ruin his household."

But Dhanājāṭa, undisturbed, said, “The lifeless earth yields a crop; will the living saints of Viṣṇu not do the same?”

In due time, the Lord Vaikuṇṭhanātha Himself sowed the field. The next day, people saw wheat sprouting where none had been sown, and marveled. They said, “This is the reward of Dhanājāṭa’s loving devotion; in his need, the Lord of Rukmiṇī has come to his aid.” When the miraculous crop was ready, he used it again to feed a gathering of holy ascetics.

Another wondrous tale concerns a pious brāhmaṇa named Sukhānanda, wholly devoted to the service of Śrīhari. Whenever Vaiṣṇavas came to his home, he worshipped them sincerely, knowing no other spiritual practice but love. The Lord’s food—mahāprasāda—was dearest to him. If anyone brought it, he would partake of it at once, without delay or doubt.

His wife, Sursurī by name, was equally devoted, knowing her husband’s heart and honoring saints with the same pure spirit. Neither desired anything beyond Hari’s prasāda.

Once, some malicious men schemed to test him. They bought sweets and fried cakes from the market and brought them to him, saying, “We have just come from the temple of Hari and brought you prasāda.” Sukhānanda, thinking it indeed holy food, ate with contentment. The mischief-makers laughed and said, “These are not from the temple—they were bought in the market. You are a learned brāhmaṇa; how could you eat such food? You must now atone or be cast out.”

Sukhānanda replied not with anger, but calmly removed from his mouth all the sweets he had eaten and placed them in the hands of his accusers. Astonished, they realized that what they had seen was no ordinary act, but the Lord’s own protection of His devotee. Shame overcame them, and they bowed, saying, “May the Lord of Rukmiṇī aid you always; we have wronged you in vain.”

Thus, Sukhānanda and his wife continued steadfast, serving the saints with one heart, their life a fragrant garland of devotion.

One day, Śukhānanda informed his noble wife Sursurī before setting forth on a pilgrimage to Mathurā, “While I am away, you must engage in the service of saints. Whenever Vaiṣṇavas come to our home, you should serve them with body, speech, and mind, and never withhold anything from them.” Thus instructing her with affection, he departed swiftly.

What transpired afterward is most wondrous to hear. One day, a mendicant in the guise of a renunciate arrived at Sukhānanda’s house. The master of the household welcomed him with reverence, bowing at his feet and worshipping him with genuine devotion. Yet, upon beholding the beauty of Sursurī, the ascetic’s mind became agitated with lust, and he said to her, “Tonight, for my sake, grant me the pleasure I desire.”

The chaste lady, hearing this, replied with calm restraint, “First, you must take your meal. In the night, I shall fulfill your wish as you say.” Giving her word thus, she served him a

sumptuous meal of six delicacies, which the disguised libertine ate to his satisfaction, again reminding her of his intent.

As the day drew to its close and the night passed into its first watch, Sursurī prepared herself, setting her mind in single-pointed concentration upon the lotus feet of her husband, as if calling to him inwardly. In the lamplight of the inner shrine, the lustful mendicant came swiftly to her door, pierced to the heart by the arrow of desire.

Yet when he gazed upon her, what he beheld was not a woman but a fierce tigress glaring with eyes full of wrath. His mind froze with terror. “This is not what I sought,” he thought. “Like one who seeks nectar but finds poison, or reaches for a chest of treasure only to grasp burning embers, or seizes what he thinks is a jeweled necklace and instead clasps a deadly serpent—so has my fate turned.”

In that fearful moment, he remembered how wicked men like Kīcaka had tried to embrace the virtuous Draupadī, only to meet destruction at the hands of Bhīma. Overcome with dread, the impostor stood trembling, while the tigress roared from within, her gaze blazing with anger. His manly pride collapsed where he stood, and the sweetness of the five sensual pleasures was utterly driven from his mind.

Humbly he said, “O mother, I have wronged you. I tormented you in my folly. Please, do not hold this sin against me.” Bowing full length upon the ground, he withdrew and spent the night outside. At dawn, Sursurī resumed her household duties as before. When the mendicant approached her, he too bowed in shame and said, “Forgive me, O mother, for my injustice.” Deep repentance took root in his heart, and he remained at that house, subduing all six inner enemies, devotedly serving her.

When four months had passed, Sukhānanda returned from pilgrimage. The mendicant told him of the wrong he had committed and of his transformation. Being a true Vaiṣṇava, Sukhānanda bestowed grace upon him, and from that day the man worshipped the Lord with steadfast love until he attained the Lord’s direct vision.

Now hear another sweet and profound tale. In the same land lived a brāhmaṇa named Mādhavadāsa, a master of the Vedas and śāstras. Though learned beyond measure, he was utterly free from worldly desire, dwelling always in detachment, caring nothing for household life. In due course, his wife passed away. Seeing this as the loosening of worldly bonds, he felt content. Whatever wealth, utensils, and provisions remained in the house he distributed among other brāhmaṇas and rejoiced in his freedom, like a bird released from its cage.

Setting forth, he journeyed to the great shrine of Jagannātha. Upon reaching the ocean’s shore, he bathed in the sacred waters, and hastened to the temple. When his eyes beheld the Lord’s embodied form, he was filled with remorse for his past entanglements and cried, “O Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, all knots of my bondage are now undone. Mother, father, brothers, kinsmen, wife, children, and wealth—all are nothing to me now. My mind is fixed wholly

upon You." Laying his head lovingly at the Lord's feet, he resolved that apart from the worship of Śrī Hari, no other practice pleased him.

Though he was a scholar, he was free from pride of learning, gentle in manner, and brimming with love for the Lord's manifest form. But as he stood absorbed in devotion, the temple priests said to him, "Do not trouble the deity here; go outside quickly. You offer only empty salutations without any actual offering in hand." Saying this, they drove him away.

Distressed in heart, Mādhavdāsa went apart and thought, "I wish to meet the Lord in His manifest form, yet I have no means for worship—no wealth, no flowers, no food. How shall I make even a mental offering when I know not the proper way? Still, outwardly, I address You, O Bearer of Garuḍa, as 'Lord, I am Your servant.'"

For three days he fasted, taking neither food nor water, chanting the holy Name day and night. Renouncing all thought of body and home, he prayed with love, "O Jagannātha, beloved of Rukmiṇī, in my plight now protect me."

Then the Lord spoke to Rukmiṇī, "Go at once in your manifest form and feed Mādhavdāsa, for he has fasted these three days." At once the universal Mother prepared a plate heaped with delicious food and went to him. Seeing her, Mādhavdāsa lost all bodily awareness and lay down in bliss. With sweet urgency, she awoke him and said, "Now take your meal."

Astonished by her beauty, Mādhavdāsa asked, "Mother, who are you? Tell me truly." She replied, "I am Rukmiṇī, the consort of the One on whom you constantly meditate. Today my Lord has commanded me to bring you food. Eat without delay, for before long the Lord Himself will grant you His direct vision."

Hearing her words, Mādhavdāsa took the meal with reverence. When he had rinsed his mouth, the goddess vanished. Yet the golden plate and jewel-encrusted vessel remained by his side. He washed them carefully and placed them near his bedding.

At dawn, when the priests came for the morning worship of the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, the plate and vessel were gone from his side. Searching in vain, they murmured, "A theft has occurred in the temple. We must quickly find the culprit…"

In the sacred temple of the Lord, the attendants began searching for the missing offering plate and vessel, questioning everyone they met. Yet, they could find no trace of it and wondered anxiously how to proceed. Eventually, their search led them to where Madhavadas was seated. The very moment they saw him, their eyes also fell upon the plate and vessel beside him, and they hastily concluded that the thief had been found. Some exclaimed that this man had been sitting here in deep, motionless meditation only to deceive them, and that after staying for several days, he had stolen the temple vessels. Without knowing the purity of his heart, they spoke harsh and accusatory words. Soon, they confined him in a room and bound him securely on all sides.

That night, the Lord of the Universe appeared in a dream to the temple priest and spoke gently, "Why have you wronged My loving devotee Madhavadas? He has been here for three days, fasting all the while. At last, I commanded Rukmini to give him food. She brought it to him in this very plate and vessel, and after he had eaten, she returned to the sanctum, forgetting to take them back. You have imprisoned him without cause—this is what I have come to tell you."

The priest awoke overwhelmed with remorse. Without delay, he went to Madhavadas, bowed to him with heartfelt humility, and confessed, "We have unjustly harassed you." Then, taking him into the temple, he placed him at the holy feet of the Lord. At that moment, the grace of Hari was poured upon Madhavadas, and the Lord gave him the vessel and plate as His own gift. From that day onward, all the residents of the holy place regarded Madhavadas with great honour, and whenever the Lord's sacred food was brought out, he was never left fasting.

Some days passed thus, until one night, during the ceremonial cleansing of the temple, the doors were closed for the night. At midnight, the priest called to Madhavadas from outside, requesting him to come out. But Madhavadas was so deeply absorbed in the contemplation of the Lord's beautiful, embodied form that he was completely oblivious to the body and to the world. Remembering the earlier miracle, the priests all came outside together and securely locked the temple doors from without.

Yet, Madhavadas, who had been sitting in meditation in the side pavilion, felt a sudden coolness upon his body. It was the Lord Himself who came swiftly to him, caressing him with His divine hands and covering him with His own fragrant garment. At dawn, when the priests entered, they did not see him lying where they had left him. Wondering greatly, they went outside—and there they beheld him clothed in the Lord's own silken robe. The very locks they had fastened the night before were still intact, and they realised with awe that the compassionate Shri Hari had Himself graced His devotee in the night.

From then on, such was the fame of Madhavadas that all honoured him, and even the king came to bow at his feet in sincere devotion. But as respect and reverence grew, his heart turned ever more detached. Yearning to behold Shri Krishna in Mathura, he set forth without delay. With a mind free from worldly desire, he journeyed along the way until he reached a certain town where a pious Vaishnava devotee was known to dwell. Hearing of his virtues, Madhavadas went to his house. The master of the house had gone to the village, but the lady of the house came forward with reverence, greeting him and saying, "Please accept some food, for I shall prepare it for you. But we are of a lowly Kshatriya caste, and it may not be fitting for you to accept our service."

Madhavadas replied gently, "You are ever engaged in the remembrance of Vishnu—your lineage is surely sanctified and worthy of honour." The lady then went to the market and brought fresh milk and sweet confections. With loving care she served him, and he ate to his satisfaction. As he departed, he met a saint upon the road who turned back to that same

house and, with a smiling sweetness, said to her, “We were in the temple when you gave us such kind hospitality. We ate to the full those sweetmeats you served, and now we have no desire for anything more.”

Thus, exchanging respectful farewells, they parted. Madhavadas bathed at the banks of the Yamuna and entered the sacred city of Mathura. Approaching the great temple, he bowed deeply at the main gateway. But upon entering the inner hall, he found the priest lying across the entrance to the sanctum, blocking the way.

When the devotees came for the blessed vision of the Lord, the temple attendants would sometimes cause obstruction, delaying them for various reasons. Now and then, they even pushed away the tender-hearted Madhavadas, causing him distress despite his pure love for the Lord. Offering mental prostrations to the Supreme, the brave Vaiṣṇava left the temple without complaint, and swiftly went to the banks of Chira Ghāt, where he steadied his mind in deep concentration.

There, bringing to mind Śrī Kṛṣṇanātha, he began to sing His praises with heartfelt devotion. As he was absorbed in this loving remembrance, a humble fisherman approached, bearing ingredients for cooking. Madhavadas prepared the food himself, and when it was ready, his mind turned again to the Lord.

It was then that a wondrous sight unfolded—Śrī Hari Himself appeared before him. The Lord stood with four arms, His dark-blue form glowing with the radiance of yellow silk garments. Divine earrings, shaped like graceful makaras, shone on His ears; His charming countenance was so captivating that beholding Him, all bodily awareness was lost. Thus did the Lord, in the most tangible form, manifest before His devotee at that very spot.

Gazing upon the Lord’s transcendental form, Madhavadas at once embraced His lotus feet. Then Jagadātmā, the Soul of the Universe, took Madhavadas into His arms and spoke to him with affection: “You are my most intimate life and soul. The temple attendants did not understand this sign; they pushed you out. Then, saddened, you came here in displeasure. In the temple I found no joy without you; my heart was restless. Thus I came searching and have found you here,” said the Vanamāli.

At these words, the eyes of the devotee filled with tears, just as the tears of a child increase when a mother tries to console him, doubling his longing. Madhavadas then offered to the Lord rice, ghee, and salt, serving Him as one might serve the Supreme on His Vaikuṇṭha throne. Pleased by the loving devotion, the Lord ate His fill. Though in the temple He would not taste even nectar without proper ritual, here, out of pure love for His devotee, He partook freely.

When the World-Life was satisfied, He gave Madhavadas a tulasī leaf for cleansing the mouth, in token of His love. Then, returning to the temple, Śrī Kṛṣṇanātha told the priest in a vision: “Today I have eaten to my full in the company of Madhavadas. You drove him away with harshness; therefore I went to Chira Ghāt in displeasure. Bring him back and

comfort him; only then will I partake of your offerings." Hearing this, the attendants were amazed.

They fetched Madhavadas with due honor. The Lord had given him direct vision, and now all understood his greatness. The One who is the beloved of Rukmiṇī is gracious to the whole world, and now Jagannātha Himself declared: "My regard for you has increased, and so I came to Mathurā. But I will not alter my resolve." He remained in Mathurā for four months, and then proceeded to Gokula and Vṛndāvana. Soon, this crest-jewel of devotees returned swiftly to Jagannātha's abode.

There, after having the Lord's darśan, Madhavadas met the resident Vaiṣṇavas. But at that very time, a sudden stomach ailment afflicted him, depriving him of all strength. Seeking relief, he sat by the seashore, suffering greatly.

It was then that the Lord of the Discus, in visible form, came to serve him, bringing water for cleansing. As soon as Madhavadas filled his waterpot, the Lord Himself washed it for him. Seeing this, Madhavadas looked into His face and said: "To remove my suffering, O Lord of the worlds, You Yourself seem powerless!"

Hearing the devotee's words, the Lord replied: "Whatever bodily experience is ordained must be endured. To remove your pain poses no difficulty for Me; but to exhaust this body's karmic share, you must live out this birth. You will bear this ailment for a few more days; then health will return." Speaking thus, Śrī Raṅga departed, and indeed, after a short time, Madhavadas began to recover.

Around that time, an eminent scholar and disputant came to Jagannātha's city. He approached Madhavadas and said, "You are well-versed in the Vedas; I wish to engage in discussion with you." Madhavadas replied, "Certainly—allow me to return from my ablutions." Taking his copper pot and cloth, he went again to the seashore, thinking: "How shall I overcome this debate?" He knew that pride was a great fault that had ruined many, and that insulting a Brāhmaṇa could even result in being cursed to become a Brahmarākṣasa.

Troubled at heart, he prayed to Śrī Hari: "Lord of all gods, how shall this danger be removed?" At once, the Supreme Lord assumed the very form of Madhavadas and went to meet the scholar. Speaking with unmatched mastery of the Vedas—the very breath from which they had sprung—the Lord confounded the scholar's mind. None in the three worlds could contend with such speech. Having accomplished this, the Lord vanished.

When Madhavadas returned from his ablutions, the scholar greeted him with swift reverence. The local Vaiṣṇavas told him, "You have certainly defeated this scholar." Humbled, the scholar cast aside his pride and said, "Your knowledge is flawless. I have traveled the world and bested great paṇḍits everywhere, but you have silenced me with but a single statement." Madhavadas understood in his heart that this was the Lord's doing.

The scholar then said, “Grant me your grace now, Master.” With body, mind, and speech, he accepted the path of Madhavadas, embracing the way of pure bhakti. By walking this true path of devotion, his life was redeemed.

Thus concludes this most delightful forty-fourth chapter of the Bhakta Līlāmṛta, where the glories of the saint are sealed with the authority of Śrī Paṇḍharīnātha. Blessed indeed are those who hear it, for their cherished desires are fulfilled.

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Chapter 45

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (In the Name of Śrī Gaṇeśa)

O fortunate and noble listeners, know well that a true devotee and the Lord are never apart from one another. Like moonlight and the moon itself, they remain ever united in essence. Just as the sun and his charioteer Aruṇa are named separately but share the same light, so too the Lord and His pure devotee, though spoken of with different names, are one in heart forever. Even as a bird cannot fly without wings, the Lord's glory cannot spread in this world without His devotees. Without the strings, how could the vīṇā of Brahmā's music ever sound? In this way, the names 'Lord' and 'Devotee' are distinct, but in truth they share a non-dual oneness.

In the previous chapter, we heard the delightful story of the loving devotee Madhavadas, whom the Lord of the Universe Himself, taking his very form, sent to vanquish a great scholar. The scholar abandoned his pride in learning, took shelter of Madhavadas, and became his disciple, thereafter worshipping the Lord with love. In this way, the Lord Himself honored the devotee, showing extraordinary favor, and drawing him even closer.

At that time, Harivyāsa, the loving servant of the Lord, was dwelling in Mathurā, worshipping with love the Lord's beautiful, tangible form. His heart overflowed with compassion for all living beings, seeing everyone as his own self. At the sight of this pure-hearted saint, even the most hardened would feel their hearts melt.

After some days, Harivyāsa set out suddenly on a pilgrimage, desiring to behold Lord Jagannātha. On the way, he came upon a place of extraordinary beauty. It was an enchanting grove, filled with many trees, a place so pure that it seemed life itself dwelt there. He said to his companions, "This is a wondrous spot. Let us bathe, perform our sandhyā worship here, and then proceed on our way." By his command they halted and pitched camp.

At that spot was a temple of a goddess, where many people came for darśan. But just then a Śūdra appeared and, without warning, killed an animal. When Harivyāsa came to know of this, his mind was filled with distaste. He thought, "Some evil must have been in store for me, that I should halt here. The people of this land are given to cruelty, devoid of compassion for living beings. If one sees such sin being committed, one too shares in its blame." Thus speaking, the Vaiṣṇava saint at once resolved to leave.

He left behind all the provisions that had been gathered for cooking—the fire lit, the flour kneaded, the pulses boiled—abandoning everything at that place. With a heavy heart, he walked away fasting. When the goddess of that shrine heard what had happened, she was filled with fear. She thought, "Harivyāsa is beloved of the Supreme Viṣṇu, who has limitless power. But he has left here fasting! If I do not bring him back, my own authority will fail." So, deciding swiftly, the primal Mother set out to meet him.

On the path, Harivyāsa was walking with a sad heart, chanting the Lord's holy names, when the great Goddess appeared before him, prostrating herself. She said, "You are leaving my āśrama fasting; then the Supreme Viṣṇu will be displeased with me, and I fear His wrath. I know you to be a realised Vaiṣṇava, yet I beg you now—please return at once," she said imploringly.

Harivyāsa replied, "At your very door an animal was slain. To take food there would be to share in the fate of those who fall into the dark hell of violence. We are fearless Vaiṣṇavas, so I speak plainly—if you renounce the practice of killing, then I will take a pure meal here. Otherwise I go on my way." Hearing the words of the Lord's devotee, the Goddess answered without hesitation, "So it shall be."

Taking Harivyāsa by the hand, she brought him back to the āśrama. That very night she appeared in a dream to the king of the land, saying: "Give strict orders throughout the realm that no animal is to be slain at my temple. The Vaiṣṇava Harivyāsa has taken shelter here—come to him at once. If you act otherwise, your whole kingdom will be lost."

The king awoke in great fear. In the morning, he told his minister of the dream, and then went to the Goddess's temple. Bowing to the Vaiṣṇava, he said with folded hands, "I now take refuge in the Lord with undivided devotion. Grant me your blessing."

The saint replied, "From this day you must never commit acts of violence, and must proclaim throughout your kingdom that no animal is to be slain." Harivyāsa remained there for six months, initiating many into the path of devotion. The place resounded with the singing of the Lord's holy names, especially during the all-night vigils of Ekādaśī. Out of love, the people gave up killing entirely; even during the goddess's own festival, not a single animal was slain. By the saint's compassion, the cruel-hearted became loving devotees, and the whole land was uplifted.

The people continued to worship the goddess, but now she was bound to Viṣṇu-bhakti. Harivyāsa established a maṭha there, leaving disciples to guide the people before departing swiftly to Lord Jagannātha's abode. Truly, the ocean of saṁsāra is vast and deep, but the saints ferry souls across with ease.

Another wondrous tale is told of that time. The chief minister of a certain king, named Tripuradāsa, by the grace of the Sadguru developed detachment from worldly life. Giving away all his wealth and property, he took up the life of renunciation. His wife was supremely virtuous and devoted to the remembrance of the Lord. The two of them came to Vṛndāvana, where they stayed in constant worship, visiting Śrī Hari's temple three times a day. The Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, pleased by His devotees' love, granted them many visions.

Once, the king himself came there and distributed much wealth to the residents of the holy place, especially to the Vaiṣṇavas and Brāhmaṇas, honoring them all. Yet, in all this giving, he forgot to perform the great worship of the Lord Himself.

When Tripuradāsa heard of this, his heart was deeply pained. “The king is ignorant,” he said. “He has given to all, but not to Lakṣmī’s Lord. It is like watering only the branches of a tree, forgetting its root; or like feeding the mother so that the child may drink milk—yet here, the mother has been left fasting, so how can the child’s hunger be satisfied?”

Thus speaking, Tripuradāsa turned to his wife and said, “It is my wish to offer garments to Śrī Hari…” At that time, Kanta spoke, saying, “There is nothing at all in the house. Living by the vow of accepting only what comes unasked, even the little that arrives is given away without attachment.” In such a condition, she wondered what garments could now be offered to the Lord, who is none other than the supreme God of gods, the Lord of Vaikuntha, to whom nothing is ever lacking. Upon His divine form, splendid garments of silk and gold are ever present in abundance; why then, she thought, should there be concern in His heart for such a trifle?

Tripuradas replied, “True indeed; yet in my heart has arisen a longing.” There had been a feast in their home, and the leftovers had been sold in the market. For that sale, when the price was asked, exactly sixteen annas had been received. With that amount, he had purchased a cotton-printed sheet, intending to use it for the worship of Sri Hari.

He then told the temple priest, “Please declare that this cloth has been acquired for the Lord. Let this be spread upon Kesava, and thus fulfill the yearning of this destitute servant.” Hearing these words, the priest responded, “This is not a fitting cloth for the Lord. Surely you feel no shame? Upon the altar of the great Lord, how could such a coarse and patched covering be suited? What want is there for our Lord that He should receive this?”

Tripuradas replied earnestly, “Tell the Lord of my humble plea. This is the garment of an orphan, offered with certainty of devotion; let Him accept it in love.” Thus speaking, he sent the cloth into the temple by force of resolve. The priest, being a man of little devotion, at once spread it before the deity.

As soon as the morning bath and worship began, an astonishing sight appeared. A chill wind blew upon the goddess Lakshmi, and the dark-blue form of the Lord trembled visibly. Seeing this strange occurrence, the assembled Vaishnava devotees brought many fine garments to cover the deity, placing them one after another upon Him. Yet still the deity shivered, and the question arose: what remedy should now be done?

At that moment, the temple treasurer, who had slept beside the cloth, came forth saying, “In the night I saw a vision. Tripuradas, with loving devotion, has given us this sheet. Therefore, spread it upon the Lord at once, and only then will the chill depart.” Hearing this, the wielder of the discus Himself was amazed in His heart. The moment the cotton cloth was placed upon Him, a wondrous sight appeared before all: the deep-blue Lord, who had been shivering with cold, became instantly still and serene. The compassionate One, who delights in the company of His servants, thus exalted the humble fame of His devotee.

All the Vaishnavas marvelled greatly, saying, “The Lord of Vaikuntha pleased by the devotion.” They told Tripuradas of this event, bowing before him with heartfelt reverence. Hearing this, the steadfast devotee was moved to tears, his voice choked with love, and eyes overflowing. “He is the Friend of the orphan, the ocean of compassion,” he declared, “Even as Sri Krishna was satisfied when Draupadi, in her love, offered Him a mere leaf of greens, so now has He been content with my poor gift, filling the three worlds with satisfaction.”

Tripuradas, in such manner, offered heartfelt praise to Sri Hari, and ever after in his heart his devotion increased more and more. Listening to such sacred tales brings swift destruction to all sins, and settles detachment firmly within the heart.

There was once a small but keen devotee named Khoji, ever intent on serving his Sadguru and devoted to the path of bhakti. He honored saints, sadhus, and valorous Vaishnavas alike, ever careful and steady in the remembrance of Sri Hari, and filled with repentance for past errors. One day, his Guru said to the people, “At the hour of my departure from this world, the sound of bells will ring in the heavens, and you will all be made aware that the song of devotion has reached its fulfilment.”

Though he made this vow, the people did not believe him fully, dismissing it without much thought. Some days later, the little Khoji set out to visit another village, and four days passed without his return. Meanwhile, the Guru felt his end approaching and said, “My true disciple is not near me at this final hour.” So speaking, he gave up his life at once. The villagers performed the funeral rites, and on the third day, Khoji returned to his Guru’s place.

When he heard that his Master had departed for the eternal abode, his heart was filled with deep grief. “I have been deprived of serving him in his last moments,” he thought. While he remained thus composed in knowledge, the people of the village began to speak ill of the Guru, saying, “He had promised that there would be a ringing of bells in the sky, but no such sound was heard.”

Khoji then told them, “Last night I saw in a dream my Guru speaking to me: ‘We are going to Vaikuntha, but the bell-sound was held back for your sake.’” Having said this, he bathed, seated himself upon an asana, and fixed his gaze upon the form of his Guru within his mind. At that very moment, the sound of heavenly bells resounded in the sky, heard by all around. With the sacred name of Rama upon his lips, Khoji gave up his life instantly, to the astonishment of all. “Blessed, blessed is he!” they cried, for he had fulfilled the word of his Master, making his body worthy of Vaikuntha by departing with the Lord’s name in his mouth.

Another devotee, known as Ladu, dwelt in Jotpur. He regarded the whole world as his own self, always detached in mind, seeing no difference between “mine” and “another’s,” between king and pauper. Constantly immersed in the sweetness of bhajan, he would sit alone in meditation upon the form of Lord Vishnu. Filled with detachment, he set out upon

a pilgrimage, marvelling at the wondrous creation of Sri Hari. He visited many holy places and renowned shrines celebrated in the Puranas, rejoicing to see saints dwelling there.

In due course, he came swiftly to the land of Kaur, where the people were mostly merciless, offering worship through acts of power. In many ways they offered liquor and meat to the goddess, even making human sacrifices, their minds intoxicated with worldly desires. It was there that the gentle Vaishnava Ladu came upon a man being led to such a sacrifice. In that moment, the four sacrificers seized Ladu himself and brought him to the temple of Ambika.

Casting aside all thought for his body, Ladu fixed his mind upon the garland-wearing Lord, the Soul of the universe, the Life of all worlds, who alone can slay and save. In firm resolve, he drew the form of Sri Vishnu into his meditation. As they held him down, one among them drew his sword to strike. Then, behold! A marvellous event took place — the goddess herself assumed a fierce form, and in an instant slew all four of the sacrificers.

She then turned to the devotee, touching his feet, and said, "Forgive all their offences." Thus, casting off her fierce aspect, the goddess assumed her gentle form — the eight-armed, adorned and playful, dancing before him.

Hearing the words of the humble Vaiṣṇava devotee, the Divine Mother, pleased at heart, spoke with maternal affection, "Ask now for whatever boon you desire. Hold not back your mind in hesitation."

The devotee replied, "O Mother, if Thou truly grantest a boon, I beg Thee to renounce, from this day forth, the offering of human sacrifice. Let no act of violence be performed at Thy shrine. Instead, let all the people of Thy land become followers of the Vaiṣṇava path."

Hearing this plea, the Goddess, who was verily the primordial Mother, assented, saying, "So shall it be." That very night, the king of that region beheld a dream. The Goddess appeared to him and declared, "By divine destiny, a Vaiṣṇava has come to this land. From this day forth, seek his refuge. At My door, let there be no act of cruelty. If thou failest in this, distress and calamity shall befall thee in worldly life."

When the king awoke and pondered this vision, wonder seized him. Without delay he went to the temple of Ambikā and bowed low before the Vaiṣṇava devotee. Those cruel men who had seized the loving devotee Lāḍu and sought to slay him lay lifeless at the temple gate, a marvel which astonished the king. Filled with remorse, he received the saint's grace, and thenceforth the whole land of Lāḍu embraced the Vaiṣṇava faith.

In that blessed land, the remembrance of Viṣṇu, the chanting of the Lord's Holy Name, the observance of Ekādaśī, and compassion toward all beings flourished. The people delighted in the service of saints. Indeed, to uplift the world, such heroic Vaiṣṇava souls descend to earth.

Among the noble devotees was one named Trilok, a goldsmith by trade, deeply devoted and of pure conduct. Though living in the world, he was inwardly detached, rendering service to

saints with heartfelt sincerity. In his craft, he worked honestly, never taking gold or silver by theft, but only using wealth earned by rightful labour.

One day, the king had arranged a marriage in his palace. Summoning Trilok, he commanded, "Craft for Me without delay an ornamented bridal girdle, set with precious jewels. In the whole city, none can rival thy skill."

Bringing forth gold and gems, the king placed them in Trilok's hands. The goldsmith took them and returned home. As he entered his house, he beheld a gathering of Vaiṣṇava devotees at the temple. Great joy rose in his heart, and he felt that his fortune had truly dawned.

He immediately prepared a beautiful feast and worshipped the saints. Serving them with love, he placed food before them and saw that all were satisfied. The saints remained in his house for two days. In the delight of their company, the task of crafting the jeweled girdle slipped from his mind.

On the third day, the king summoned him and asked for the ornament. Fear stirred in Trilok's heart. With folded hands, he pleaded for four days' grace to complete the work. The king, however, warned, "If thou failest, punishment shall surely befall thee."

Returning home, the devoted goldsmith became troubled. "This work is difficult and requires four full days," he thought. "Yet in the service of saints I have spent the time." Deciding at last, he fled to the forest and, sitting in solitude, fixed his mind in one-pointed remembrance of Śrī Rukmiṇīkānta.

While he prayed thus through the night, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha, knowing His devotee's peril, resolved to act. Assuming the exact form of Trilok, the Lord seated Himself in the goldsmith's workshop and swiftly completed the jeweled girdle. He then presented Himself before the king.

The king, beholding the ornament, marveled at its beauty and flawless setting, which dazzled the eyes with the radiance of its gems. Pleased beyond measure, he rewarded "Trilok" with abundant wealth.

The Lord, still in the guise of the goldsmith, brought the treasure to Trilok's home, gave it to his wife, and commanded, "Today there is festive joy in our temple. Saints shall come to our home—prepare sweetmeats at once." The wife obeyed.

When the meal was ready, the Lord, still in Trilok's form, worshipped the saints and served them. After they had eaten, He Himself partook, tied up the prasāda, and hastened into the forest.

There, adopting the form of a wandering ascetic, the Lord approached Trilok and asked, "Why art thou here in the forest, far from the path?" The goldsmith bowed before the saintly figure and replied, "O Master, I have lost my way. In the village there is a goldsmith named

Trilok; I have eaten to my fill at his house, for he had invited the Vaiṣṇavas and served them abundantly. I have brought prasāda for thee."

Hearing this, Trilok was struck with wonder. The ascetic then seated him and, covering him with the shade of complete grace, fed him the mahāprasāda. After the meal, Trilok asked, "O revered one, why was such a great feast arranged, and whence came the wealth to bear the cost?"

The Lord, revealing Himself as Rukmiṇīkānta, replied, "It was I who took the jeweled girdle to the king and gladdened his heart. The wealth he bestowed was spent in the service of saints."

Hearing this reply from the "ascetic," Trilok was overwhelmed with devotion and astonishment, knowing that the Lord Himself had laboured in his stead to protect his honour and sustain his service to the saints.

Taking the Vaiṣṇava devotee with him, he returned home quietly, almost in fear. When his wife, with loving concern, inquired about the matter, the ascetic kept his identity concealed. She asked him why he had returned so suddenly, and with what strange mood. "It seems you had gone to arrange a royal grant," she said, "and the king has bestowed upon you wealth and resources."

The Vaiṣṇava then confided in her, "It was you yourself who inspired me to make this journey. In my heart I feel that the Lord of the three worlds has Himself understood my purpose, for He has toiled and laboured for my sake." This very Lord—who is the beloved of Brahmā, the Saviour of the worlds, dwelling eternally in Vaikuṇṭha—had taken upon Himself the form of a humble goldsmith and had, it seemed, delighted the king.

When the people would come to know of this, the prestige of the shrine would surely grow manifold. Yet in his own mind he remained quietly astonished, living on as before, with outward simplicity. Through the Lord's grace, all obstacles were removed and every auspicious success came of its own accord. With renewed zeal, he continued to serve the saints with sincerity and pure-hearted devotion.

In that town there lived also a certain Sajjana, a butcher by trade, who was nevertheless a Vaiṣṇava devotee of the highest order. Though engaged in worldly dealings, he was utterly detached within. He attended to his profession as merely a means to pass time. He would buy meat wholesale in the market and sell it, but all the while he kept his mind absorbed in bhajan.

Yet he never himself committed an act of slaughter, nor would he ever speak false words. Whenever he saw a Vaiṣṇava devotee, he would bow down to him with reverence. Whatever provisions or hospitality were required by a guest, he would provide them, satisfying all without discrimination. His heart was full of compassion for all beings, and he maintained strict inner and outer purity. His clothes and utensils were spotless, the Tulasī

garden in his courtyard was fresh and flourishing, and he bathed daily, remembering always the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha.

His wife too was of exalted character—devoted, chaste, and fully supportive of her husband's spiritual welfare. Understanding his mind, she also engaged herself in serving sādhus and saints. For weighing the meat in his shop, Sajjana had kept a Śālagrāma stone as a counterweight. Beholding such a sacred emblem used in this way, the Life of the Universe, Lord Nṛhari Himself, felt a certain pang.

One day, as Sajjana sat in his shop, a brāhmaṇa came by, and at once recognised the Śālagrāma. Deeply agitated, the brāhmaṇa pleaded with him, "This is the very form of Lord Viṣṇu! It is not proper for you to keep Him here in such a place. Please, give Him to me at once. If you desire some payment, I shall give it to you immediately." Hearing this, Sajjana promptly handed over the Śālagrāma.

The brāhmaṇa took it home and, filled with great enthusiasm, invited other learned brāhmaṇas. Together they performed the worship of Lord Viṣṇu with full Vedic rites. They bathed the deity with sanctified water and offered all sixteen upacāras of formal worship. Yet the Transcendent Lord did not accept those offerings, for He had been inwardly engaged in the service of His true devotee.

That night, Lord Jagatjīvana appeared to the brāhmaṇa in a dream and said, "I was dwelling happily in the home of Sajjana the butcher. Why did you so hastily bring Me here? I cannot remain away from him. At daybreak, return Me to My former place without delay, else great harm will befall you in but a moment."

Awakening in terror, the brāhmaṇa at once refrained from taking food or water without returning the Śālagrāma. Thus Sajjana too passed one day and one night fasting. At sunrise, the brāhmaṇa arrived at Sajjana's house, narrated the entire dream, and said, "You are indeed a true Vaiṣṇava devotee. Worship your Lord with love, and keep Him with you."

Hearing these words, Sajjana's heart was filled with joy. He performed worship of the Śālagrāma with great devotion, and only then took food and water. For the Lord, who hungers only for loving devotion, never considers a person's caste or outer occupation. Even if one's work is humble or considered lowly, He dwells happily with such a devotee, without ever being swayed by worldly notions of prestige.

The Lord remained in Sajjana's home in the form of the Śālagrāma, and in time a thought arose in Sajjana's mind to undertake a pilgrimage to Lord Jagannātha. A great company of pilgrims was setting forth, and Sajjana, taking the Śālagrāma with him, joined them. He worshipped the sacred stone daily with honour, bathed each morning, applied twelve marks of gopīcandana, wore Tulasī beads around his neck, and shone with the full dignity of a Vaiṣṇava.

Maintaining his vows, he performed the daily pūjā to the Śālagrāma and sustained himself on alms collected along the pilgrimage route. At night, he would halt at some distance from the main encampment, following a steady routine.

Thus proceeding, they came near a certain town. Seeking alms, Sajjana entered one house. The mistress of that household was a woman of loose conduct, inflamed with lust at the sight of him. Concealing her intent, she detained him there, offering him food and showing him great outward respect.

The pure-hearted Vaiṣṇava, knowing nothing of her inner deceit, accepted her hospitality and stayed there for the night. Around midnight, the woman came to him swiftly and whispered, "I shall come with you." To this Sajjana replied, "Your husband sleeps within—such a thing cannot be."

But she, without hesitation, went back inside, killed her sleeping husband by severing his head, and brought it to Sajjana. "I have slain my husband with my own hands," she said, "Now you must satisfy my desire." But the devoted Vaiṣṇava refused outright.

She then threatened him, "It was for you that I killed my husband. If you refuse me now, I shall disgrace you publicly." Saying this, the wicked woman went out at once, blowing a conch in the marketplace, and soon the townsfolk gathered at her house… She began to recount the incident, saying, "This thief entered the house, and at that very moment he surely slew my beloved husband. After placing the garlands and coins upon himself, this so-called Vaiṣṇava appeared to be a man of corrupt conduct. Believing him to be such, I brought him to my home, not knowing he was a determined murderer."

As the adulterous woman spoke thus, the people around were astonished. Then, taking the Vaiṣṇava devotee into custody, they led him before the local magistrate. The magistrate asked the devotee, "Why did you act thus? You were welcomed and fed in this man's home, and yet you repaid such hospitality with murder?"

At this, Sajjana, the butcher-devotee, related the entire matter from beginning to end with truth and clarity. Yet, because of certain marks visible upon him, his account did not appear credible to them. Some said, "Around his neck are countless tulasī garlands, and yet he has slain the master of the house—how can such a man be called righteous?" Others spoke, "Why speak falsely against him? This is the doing of that adulteress, who, after killing her husband, now seeks to cast the blame upon him." Still others concluded, "Let us not heed the words of that woman. It is best to release this pilgrim, for that would indeed be meritorious."

Such counsel from the devout took root in the magistrate's mind, and so Sajjana Kasāī was set free. At that moment, however, the adulteress cried out, "It is he who has slain my husband! If you will not deliver him into my hands, then I shall take this matter swiftly before the royal court." Her insistence was great, and so, at her urging, they severed Sajjana's hand.

The valiant Vaiṣṇava bore this sorrow, saying only, “Ah, this is but the inescapable fruit of my past deeds.”

When the pilgrimage ended and the crowd dispersed, people asked one another, “Where and for what theft was his hand cut off?” And many reasoned thus in their minds. Yet Sajjana Kasāī remained content, devoutly engaged in the worship of Śrī Hari.

As he continued upon his pilgrimage, the path led him daily onward, until at last he reached the abode of Lord Jagannātha. There an extraordinary event took place. The Lord Himself appeared in a vision to His priest, saying, “Take the palanquin and go. There is My devotee, Sajjana Kasāī by name—bring him here and seat him within it.”

Awakening from this dream, the priest was filled with wonder. At once, he took the palanquin and entered among the pilgrims, inquiring aloud, “Who among you is the Vaiṣṇava devotee Sajjana Kasāī? Our Lord Jagannātha has commanded that he be seated in this palanquin and brought before Him.” The pilgrims, recognizing Sajjana, pointed him out to the priest. The priest said to him, “O Vaiṣṇava devotee, you are most dear to Jagannātha. Come, be seated in this palanquin and accept this honour.”

The onlookers were astonished, for they remembered, “This is the man whose hand was cut off for theft upon the way.” Yet they also said, “Truly the Lord is the purifier of the fallen—here is proof before our very eyes. He has sent a palanquin for one condemned as a thief.” Sajjana spoke humbly in reply, “Who can know the heart of another? Why speak idle blame without cause? Let one rather engage in the remembrance of the Lord’s Name.”

Knowing the purity of his inner devotion, the Lord had sent the palanquin for him. Seeing this witness of the Lord’s own hand, those who had slandered him realized the futility of their words. But in this world there are ever three kinds of men—those who blame, those who praise, and those who do both in turn—yet through experience some are brought to revere the saints.

When the priest urged him again to enter the palanquin, saying, “Come, your longing for Jagannātha is about to be fulfilled,” Sajjana replied, “I will not sit in comfort. Though I committed no fault, my hand was cut off by the will of Jagannātha. First the nose is cut, and only afterwards is the reason explained—such is the way the Lord teaches His servant. Why then, O my dark-hued friend, my protector of the helpless, did You become angry with me?”

His eyes filled with tears as he spoke. “The Purāṇas declare that the Lord comes to the aid of His devotee in times of distress—yet to me this appears untrue by my own experience.” And thus he resolved to bind the Lord’s name upon his feet, and with mind, speech, and body to follow only His path.

Honoured in many ways, Sajjana Kasāī at that very moment beheld Śrī Hari in a manifest form—four-armed, dark-complexioned, with divine earrings glistening, holding conch and

discus in His hands, clad in radiant yellow silk. Concealing the vision from others' eyes, the Supreme Lord embraced him tightly.

Then the loving devotee asked, "Why, O Lord, did You have my hand cut off? What deed from a past birth has borne this fruit? Tell me at once." The Lord of the universe replied, "In a former birth you were a brāhmaṇa. One day, after bathing in the Gaṅgā, you sat in meditation upon Me. Just then, a cow escaped from a butcher and fled swiftly. The butcher came in search of her and questioned you. You gave him no reply, but by a sign of your hand you indicated her path. Thus he went, caught the cow, and took her life.

Debt, enmity, and killing—these are bonds that are not broken without repayment. To exact this debt, the cow was reborn as a woman, and the butcher as her husband. By destiny, you came to dwell in her home. At night she sought to entangle you in sin; when her husband's life was ended, she fulfilled the enmity of her past birth by cutting off his head and casting the blame upon you. The very hand with which you had once pointed out the cow she caused to be severed. Such is the law of past births."

The Lord continued, "When you worshipped Me in your mind and yet beheld the butcher before your eyes, you were born into his lineage in this life. Still, the habits of your brāhmaṇa birth remained, and thus your devotion was steadfast. I, the Lord upon Śeṣa, have been captivated by your worship."

Then, pleased beyond measure, Jagannātha revealed a wondrous act: in the sight of all, Sajjana's severed hand was restored whole. Cries of victory and the clapping of hands resounded; the company of devotees rejoiced, saying, "The garland-wreathed Lord of the forest has blessed His devotee with rare favour!" Seeing such a marvel, all bowed in reverence, declaring, "Blessed is this heroic Vaiṣṇava—he has won the companionship of the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha."

Displaying such deeds, the Lord ever increases the fame of His servant. Sajjana Kasāī, his heart overflowing with joy, went to behold Lord Jagannātha. Bathing in the sea, he took the Lord's darśana and remained there throughout the Cāturmāsya, daily beholding the deity and ever delighting in remembrance and kīrtana. At last, taking the Lord's leave, he returned to his own dwelling.

In countless ways the Lord shows the various states of His saints, yet in all is the same loving devotion. Beholding this, the husband of Rukmiṇī is charmed and magnifies their noble repute in the world.

Thus ends this sweet forty-fifth chapter of the Bhaktalīlāmṛta, the hearing of which fulfills the desires of the devout, like a loving stream of nectar to the heart of the faithful.

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Chapter 46

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ.

Salutations to Lord Ganesha, the source of all auspiciousness, the treasury of supreme perfections, the true abode of liberation through union with the Divine, and the sanctified vessel of saintly deeds. This is the dwelling place of the soul in its fullest realization, the fourth and highest form of devotion beyond even liberation, the inner light of the loving heart, and the steady courage of the pure and virtuous. It is the marvel of divine nectar, the lofty radiance of the celestial realms, the boundless sky holding within it the entire creation. It is the repose of Vaishnava devotion, the seat of the sacred Ganga, and the meditative vision of Lord Hari in His manifest form. It is the cooling rain upon a world scorched by drought, the turning of the worldly wheel by one who is steadfast in righteousness, and the holy accounts of the saints.

In the earlier episode, the wondrous tale was told of Sajjana Kasāī, the gentle-hearted devotee, who in his days as a butcher was transformed through the grace of the Lord of the Universe. By divine favour his hand, once severed, was restored in an instant.

Now, as a Vaishnava devotee, Naravahan, he served the saints diligently, ever remembering Radha and Krishna, and constantly chanting Their names. He dwelt by the banks of the great river, ferrying people across in his boat. He passed his time in quiet detachment, never demanding payment from holy Vaishnavas, saints, or the poor and destitute, though he would gladly accept the offerings of the wealthy merchants, considering it all as belonging to the Lord and using it with discernment.

One day, however, mischief-makers gathered together and schemed to bring him harm. They went before the king and accused Naravahan of hiding his ferry earnings, claiming that instead of depositing them in the royal treasury, he kept the wealth in his own temple. Hearing their words, the king was inflamed with anger and ordered that Naravahan's house be plundered. The royal guards hastened to search his dwelling, yet found no treasure at all. Not even an ornament was uncovered, for Naravahan had spent all he earned in the service of the saints. Still, the guards seized him and brought him before the king.

The slanderers whispered further that Naravahan must have hidden his wealth elsewhere. At this, the king ordered him thrown into prison until he confessed the whereabouts of his treasure, threatening his very life should he remain silent. That day, the devotee fasted, and by evening his servant woman brought him food. Naravahan asked her in sorrow, "I have been cast into prison, and see no means of escape. What shall I do?" She replied gently, "Why do you let your heart be troubled? Even in the face of calamity, remember Lord Hari. Just as a starving man in famine longs for the gift of food, just as one drowning calls upon the rescuer, and just as a sick man utters the life-restoring mantra, so too should a devotee in distress call out to the Lord."

Her words took root in his heart. Taking the tulsi beads in his hand, he began his solitary worship. Fixing his mind upon the gracious forms of Radha and Krishna, he meditated without ceasing, night and day, chanting Their holy names. In his heart's vision, he beheld the dark-blue, four-armed Lord of Vaikuntha, adorned with conch and discus. Before this divine deity he prayed, "O Lord of Lords, Giver of the Highest Liberation, free me from the snares of worldly illusion."

Hearing the cry of His devotee, the wielder of the discus hastened to his aid. On the third day, He broke Naravahan's chains and appeared to the king in a dream, saying, "Naravahan is My true devotee, ever engaged in the service of saints. You have tormented him without cause, thus destroying your own merit. Blinded by royal pride, you listened to the counsel of the wicked and oppressed a Vaishnava." The Lord commanded him to bow before Naravahan and make amends.

Awakening in fear, the king hurried to the prison, called Naravahan forth, and humbly begged his forgiveness. "Do not count my offense," he pleaded, "but return to your temple. I wronged you by heeding the evil-minded." Naravahan, seeing the Lord's hand in all, forgave the king. Returning home, he and his household rejoiced, continuing their saintly service with even greater devotion, and divine blessings flowed into their dwelling.

Another sweet tale follows. There were two royal brothers, Rayasingh and Angada. Angada's wife was a most virtuous and devout woman, deeply devoted to the worship of Vishnu and the hearing of the Lord's stories. Upon meeting a pious devotee, she accepted his guidance and engaged constantly in loving remembrance of the Lord's name. One day, the revered Sadguru came unexpectedly to their town. Overjoyed, she brought him to the temple, performing his worship with all honour.

When Angada learned of this, he became angry and forbade her, declaring, "A wife's god is her husband. If you claim there is some greater deity, show Him to me!" In his obstinacy, he prevented her from serving the Sadguru. She, in turn, refrained from food for three days. Pleased with her steadfast devotion, Lord Vishnu appeared to Angada in a dream in His four-armed form, dark and beautiful, adorned with golden garments, the discus and conch in His hands, and earrings shaped like makaras. In awe, Angada bowed at the Lord's feet and offered his heart in surrender. At dawn, he told his wife, "It is by your grace that the Lord of Vaikuntha has blessed me with His vision."

Together they brought the Sadguru home, worshipped him with deep devotion, and received his blessings. Henceforth, both husband and wife dedicated themselves to the service of Vishnu, offering their wealth only to the worthy.

In due course, Rayasingh sent his younger brother Angada to a distant land with some of the royal forces. There, Angada subdued a certain king and found a hundred diamonds, which he divided among the Vaishnavas. Keeping only one for himself, he resolved to offer it to Lord Jagannatha.

When a devout Vaiṣṇava guest arrived at the home, the pious Angad offered him wealth at his brother's request. Yet he secretly withheld an inestimable diamond, hiding it away, and the servants reported this to the master. When Rāyasingh demanded it for himself, Angad refused to part with it in any manner. His brother's mind, thus agitated by disappointment, became poisoned with anger.

In this fury, he spoke to his sister, urging her to mix poison into Angad's food. She was to make certain that Angad consumed it. Thus, with deceit in their hearts, they invited Angad to dine. This hidden malice did not cross Angad's innocent mind. The sister prepared the food, mixing the deadly venom into the rice, and served it to him.

But before partaking, Angad, with steadfast love, brought the meal into his meditation, offering it mentally to the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha. Observing His devotee's resolve, the Supreme Lord wondered with delight at what would now unfold. Entering the sister's heart, He warned Angad: "Do not eat this food; poison has been mixed into it at the urging of your own brother."

Yet the steadfast Vaiṣṇava replied inwardly: "Lord, I have offered this meal to You with devotion. This, therefore, is mahāprasāda — it should never be rejected, but lovingly honored." And so, invoking the Lord Himself as the true enjoyer, Angad ate the food in its entirety. By the grace of Jagannātha, the poison caused him no harm, for He is the protector of all life, the one who drank the venom to save Prahlāda, who preserved the life of Mīrābāī, and who ever rescues His devotees in distress.

Later, Angad related this entire episode to his queen, declaring that he would not remain on this earth any longer, for his heart had turned away from worldly life. Taking his wife along, he departed swiftly toward the holy abode of Lord Jagannātha. When Rāyasingh heard of this, his rage flared anew, and he sent an armed force with orders to seize Angad at once, take the diamond, and return without delay.

The soldiers surrounded him in force. Angad then took the diamond in his hand, showed it openly to all, and, with swift movement, cast it into the waters, saying: "O Jagannātha, let this now come to You." The men of Rāyasingh plunged in to search, but Angad said to them: "Why do you labor in vain? The diamond now rests upon the neck of Jagannātha Himself. If you doubt my words, come — I shall show you."

The astonished soldiers followed him to the temple. Upon reaching the sanctum, they beheld the Lord, and there upon His neck shone the very gem. They inquired of the priests as to who had brought it. The priests replied truthfully: "Four days ago, around midday, this diamond was found before the Lord's deity. We kept it aside, but that night, Lord Cakrapāṇi appeared in a dream, commanding us: 'Place this jewel upon My neck, for it has been offered by My true devotee, King Angad.' And so, we fixed it firmly in its place."

Hearing this account, the soldiers stood in awe and quickly sent word to Rāyasingh. The news struck him with deep remorse. "I have wronged my own brother without cause," he

lamented. He wrote humbly to Angad: “Come back to your rightful place. I knew not that you were a realized servant of the Lord. Coveting what perishes, I bore enmity toward you. Henceforth I shall keep no such thoughts; come to me with affection, bringing the blessing of Jagannātha.”

When Angad received the letter, he rejoiced in heart. “By the Lord’s grace,” he mused, “even stone can sprout vines, and iron can gain luster without touching the philosopher’s stone.” Bowing before Jagannātha, he prayed: “When Your mercy dawns, even an enemy becomes a friend. O Compassionate Lord of the helpless, by accepting my mere leaf of tulasī, You have magnified Your own glory.”

Having sought leave from the Lord, King Angad returned home. By the virtue of this saintly company, Rāyasingh’s heart turned toward devotion to Viṣṇu.

In those days there was also another ruler named Mādhōsiṅgh, whose queen was of rare virtue, the daughter of King Pṛthurāja. She too was favored by the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha. While she lived with her husband, a noble son was born to her. In service to the queen, the king appointed a maidservant.

This maid, ever moving about in her duties, cherished love for the remembrance of the Lord’s holy name. The queen, noticing her deep absorption, asked: “Tell me, what is this you chant?” The maid replied: “I remember Śrī Hari. This perishable body will pass away; if one lets a single moment slip, it will be lost forever.”

Hearing this, the virtuous queen felt a stirring in her heart and implored: “Then teach me this worship without delay.” The maid instructed her to bathe and perform worship of Viṣṇu, saying: “Meditate upon Śrī Kṛṣṇa of Vraja.” These words sank deep into the queen’s mind. Her heart became bound to the feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and tears flowed unceasingly from her eyes. All worldly duties faded from her mind; she no longer thought of husband or child.

The king, troubled by this change, asked her one day why she had grown so detached. She answered: “What profit is there in telling you? My mind is absorbed in the vision of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, yet I do not behold Him in form.” Speaking thus, she wept, and the king, seeing her in this state, grew angry.

Fear entered her gentle heart — and in that instant, closing her eyes, she beheld before her the Lord’s four-armed form: dark as a raincloud, clad in shining yellow garments, adorned with crown, earrings, and forest garland. At this vision her eyes found their rest, and she bowed with all devotion.

The Lord placed His hand upon her head and said: “When I stand here beside you, why harbor even the smallest fear?” Speaking thus, the Lord of Rukmiṇī disappeared, and the queen opened her eyes. The king, unaware of what had transpired, rebuked her: “Cease these foolish ways. From now on, no saint or ascetic shall be admitted to the palace.”

Obedient to her husband's word, she refrained from inviting the saints. Yet the maidservant, steadfast in her service, secretly brought to the queen the sacred water from the saints' feet, which the queen drank daily with love, ever absorbed in the remembrance of Viṣṇu.

But the chief minister of the king, a man without devotion, learned of this and sent a detailed report to King Mādhōsiṅgh.

Ghunwanti, though commanded otherwise, never abandoned the remembrance of Lord Vishnu. Even in secrecy, she would partake of the sacred water sanctified by the saints, treasuring it within her heart. When her husband was deeply agitated in mind, the virtuous lady responded not with argument, but by quietly offering her tresses to the barber's hand, firmly fixing renunciation in her heart. She removed her ornaments and adorned herself instead with tulsi-bead necklaces. Upon her forehead she bore the upward mark of gopichandan, and thus she became a true woman ascetic.

She would invite holy saints to her home, serving them with every form of reverence, while in her own heart she constantly remembered Shri Hari. News of this reached the chief minister, who, for the sake of her son, conveyed a message to the king. Her husband, though outwardly speaking to her as before, felt a hidden contentment in his heart, thinking, "My household life has found its true fulfillment."

But the prince, hearing of his consort's renunciation, was filled with intense wrath. In his fury, he sent four servants, commanding them to kill her outright. At that time, Ghunwanti was in the Vishnu temple, engaged in worship with pure devotion. The murderers arrived, their minds darkened with evil, and sat waiting until she should emerge. But she knew nothing of this wicked design.

Then, the Lord of Vaikuntha Himself, the God of gods, assumed the form of a great tiger. In a moment, a mighty, five-faced tiger appeared within the temple. Seeing this wondrous sight, Ghunwanti was astonished, yet in her heart she regarded it as none other than the Lord, and began to worship Him. With sandal paste, flowers, and garlands, she offered all with loving devotion. "O Lord," she said, "why have You taken the form of a tiger? I cannot discern the reason."

When her worship was complete, she stepped outside for the service of the saints. But as the murderers rose to seize her, the tiger suddenly leapt upon them. In a single bound, it slew four of them, and with a roar, chased the rest until they fled in terror. Then, returning to the temple, the tiger vanished from sight. The devotees, their hearts trembling with wonder, exclaimed in joy, "To protect His true devotee from danger, the Lord Himself has taken this tiger form! Even the would-be murderers have met their fate."

This news reached Madhosingh, and he learned that the Lord had indeed assumed the tiger form to slay the four men. Great remorse then filled the prince's heart. "We are truly sinful and foolish," they said, "for we sent those men to kill her, yet she has been embraced by

Shri Hari's grace." A message was then sent to the minister, saying, "Ghunwanti is engaged in serving saints. Whatever expenses she requires, give without hesitation."

Later, the two royal brothers, taking their army, set out for home. As they travelled, they came upon the great river Mahanadi, which they sought to cross by boat. But in midstream, the vessel began to sink, and fear gripped the hearts of all. In that peril, they remembered Ghunwanti, and at once the boat reached the shore safely. Upon entering their city, they went without delay to the temple of the Lord. Madhosingh's elder brother bowed before Ghunwanti and said, "By uttering your name in truth, we crossed the river unharmed."

Through the power of saintly company, the two brothers became devout, firmly establishing a pure and sattvic way of life, and serving saints with zeal.

Now hear another sweet and profound tale. There was once a royal priest, a Brahmin, to whom a daughter was born. From her earliest years, he directed her love towards the worship of Shri Hari. Her name was Kunwarabai, and though married, she was ever detached at heart. As she grew in age and grace, her husband came to take her home. But upon seeing him, the gentle lady's heart was troubled. "All pleasures of the senses are fleeting," she thought. "When enjoyed, they lead only to manifold sorrows. In the end they drag one to the threefold hells, while barring the bliss of the Self.

"Association with the husband will bring children, and through attachment to them, delusion will arise. Then the Lord will never be attained." Such was her firm discernment, and thus two watches of the night passed. Quietly, she removed all ornaments, and walking out of the village, she fixed her mind upon Shri Krishna. The Lord Himself, opening the locked gates, led her forth unseen.

On the road she encountered a poor and orphaned traveller, and taking that very form herself, she carried her bundle of clothes hidden within. Thus disguised, she journeyed to Vrindavan, and at Chir Ghat, she bathed in the Yamuna before having the darshan of Shri Krishna. With folded hands, Kunwarabai prayed, "O Lord, now free me from the bondage of worldly existence," and she fell at His feet. The ornaments she still had, she at once distributed to the Vaishnavas, then sat down in quiet contentment.

"Lord of all gods, elder of the worlds," she prayed, "cast upon me Thy merciful glance. Manifest before me in form, and cut forever the snare of worldly bondage." Thus absorbed, she fasted for three days, until the Lord of life appeared before her in His full form. Placing His hand of fearlessness upon her head, He said, "Cast away all anxiety. I, Shri Hari, holding the Sudarshana, will guard you in every way."

The Lord then said, "Now go and sit by Radha Kund. This vision alone will give you contentment." Kunwarabai obeyed, and the Lord Himself brought her food. At that time her father, searching for her, arrived there and was filled with joy on seeing her. But he reproved her gently, saying, "Why have you fled here? You have brought reproach upon our family; shame has come to us."

Kunwarabai replied, “Even now you are bound to worldly life. Sixty years have passed over you, yet renunciation has not arisen in your heart. This perishable body, this false delusion, is like the shadow of a gourd—worthless and fleeting. Only by remembering Shri Krishna can one’s actions be truly noble.”

Hearing his daughter’s words of wisdom, the father’s heart was moved. Yet he said, “Come now to our home. Without hesitation or fear, serve Shri Hari there. You need not return to your husband’s house; follow my word.” Thus did he entreat her in many ways.

At that moment, the Lord Himself spoke within her vision, saying, “Go with your father now. If you but remember Me, I shall deliver you from all dangers.” With the Lord’s command, she returned home, where she set up a shrine with Vishnu’s deity, worshipping daily with all offerings and with love deep in her heart. She honoured saints and Vaishnavas with reverence, and each night she held kirtans in the Lord’s name, filling every listener’s mind with joy.

Through the company of Kunwarabai, many developed devotion, until even the local ruler, Sheikhawat, heard of her noble fame. Turning to his priest, he said, “Your daughter, endowed with every virtue, has given herself wholly to the worship of Shri Hari. Such is the praise I have heard.”

Their singing was of a rare and wondrous sweetness, each one listening intently to the other’s voice, and together filling the air with a divine resonance. On that very day, the king of the land arrived at the house where this blissful gathering was taking place. At the temple’s threshold stood the beautiful deity of Lord Viṣṇu, adorned with fine garments, ornaments, and jewels. Before the Lord, the noble Lady Kunvarabai was engaged in resounding kīrtana, her voice ringing with devotion.

The rhythmic beat of the mṛdaṅga and the joyous calls of praise seemed to awaken the very essence of Nāda Brahman. Anklets were tied upon her feet, and she danced gracefully in pure love for the Lord. Her songs were composed in intricate patterns, her dance displayed refined artistry, and in the midst of glorifying the dark-hued Lord, tears of love flowed from her eyes, while her voice choked with emotion.

The assembly was filled with many devout souls, and in their midst sat the king. As he beheld her beauty, an unholy restlessness arose in his heart. Struck by the arrow of desire, his mind found no delight in the Lord’s virtues, and his eyes grew heavy with a slumber that crept upon him moment by moment. In that half-dreaming state, a strange vision unfolded before him. He beheld a mighty river flowing in full spate, carrying away countless living beings. On the far shore stood Kunvarabai herself, calling out to him, “O sinner! Come to me.”

Awakening from this vision, the king was startled and deeply shaken. He pondered its meaning and was pierced by the pangs of remorse. “On the farther shore of the river of worldly existence,” he thought, “stands the virtuous Kunvarabai; but I am a most sinful man—how shall I ever cross to that side?” Filled with repentance, he bowed with sincere

humility, and from that day, obtaining her blessing, he devoted himself steadfastly to the worship of Lord Viṣṇu.

In time, Giridhar, the son of Giridharlal, dwelling in Vṛndāvana, became deeply devoted and of noble character. Through bhakti, knowledge, and detachment, he won the favour of the Discus-bearing Lord. Compassion for all beings filled his heart; his tongue was ever engaged in the remembrance of Hari; he was absorbed in the service of saints, and honoured them as he would the Lord Himself. With anklets fastened to his feet, he sang kīrtana with sweet music, often adorning himself in the guise of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, pouring forth love without measure.

One day, intending to perform the Rāsa dance, he arrived at the Viṣṇu temple. People had gathered in great numbers to witness the event and urged that the kīrtana be begun. Giridhar hastened to the deity of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and bowed. But a sudden difficulty arose in his mind—he had forgotten the special garments for the performance at home, and if he went to fetch them, there would be considerable delay. As he stood gazing at the Lord's face, behold! splendid embroidered garments appeared before him, to the wonder of all who watched. They whispered to one another, "Śrī Hari delights in the Rāsa, and has shown this true miracle." Thus the Lord, embracing His servant, magnified the glory of the saints.

Giridhar bowed again in gratitude, and that day's festival overflowed with joy. The people were struck with awe, saying, "We have seen with our own eyes the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa's very incarnation." The minds of all rose above worldly thought, and they declared it a most blessed and auspicious day. Giridhar's fame spread widely, and even the great and noble came to revere him.

In those days another incident occurred. A certain Vaiṣṇava devotee, whether householder or renunciate, was dear to Giridhar. One day this devotee died suddenly. Giridhar, with his own hands, bathed and worshipped the lifeless body, placing a tulasī garland and smearing it with gopīcandana in loving reverence. Then he washed the devotee's feet and drank that water as sacred tīrtha.

A brāhmaṇa woman, seeing this, rebuked him sharply, saying, "You have placed into your mouth the very water from a corpse! You have abandoned the ways of the Vedas and corrupted the order. By your conduct, you will cause the fall and intermingling of the castes. The dead body belongs to the lowest and most impure—yet you have taken its tīrtha with affection!"

Giridhar replied calmly, "Saints descend to the world for the deliverance of all beings; they are untouched by birth or death. Their consciousness pervades all and is present in every being. In them there is no duality whatsoever."

Hearing this, the brāhmaṇas said, "You speak much of Brahma-jnāna; now show us a miracle that we may accept your words as truth. If saints have no death, then bring this body back

to life. Otherwise, we shall expel you from our company and declare you unfit to eat with us."

Thus pressed, Giridhar faced a great trial. Steadying his mind in one-pointed meditation, he closed his eyes and fixed his heart upon the form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. In that very moment, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha came to his aid. Suddenly, before the eyes of all the brāhmaṇas, the dead man sat upright, alive once more. Then all, elders and common folk alike, bowed to Giridhar and said, "You have indeed been aided by the Lord of Rukmiṇī, and have shown us a most wondrous deed."

The Lord Himself thus exalts the glory of His devotees, so that by merely hearing of such events, the faithful may surely cross the ocean of worldly existence.

Another delightful tale is told—of a great soul named Nārāyaṇa Svāmī. In earlier days he had accepted sannyāsa and overcome the six inner enemies. He was adorned with the full virtues of devotion, knowledge, and detachment, and when he attained the state beyond body-consciousness, even the great paramahaṁsas marvelled at him. In that state of Brahman-realisation, and all sense of bodily identity had vanished. To him, king and beggar were alike as mere atoms, and the one Reality of Consciousness alone was manifest. Accepting disciples from all castes, he lived a life beyond the grasp of worldly thought, and wondrous was the story of his deeds.

At the time of the grand Siṁhastha festival at Tryambakeshwar in Nāśik, countless pilgrims had gathered from all quarters. Among them came the naked, sky-clad digambara Avadhūta, Śrī Nārāyaṇa Svāmī, walking in unison with the holy stream of seekers.

In that sacred town dwelt a renunciate of the Bhāratī order, who had established a monastery there. Hearing of the presence of the great Paramahaṁsa, he felt immense joy and contentment in his heart. Out of deep affection, he seated the saint beside him and invited him to partake of food. Instructing his disciples, the gosāvī arranged a vessel and spread out a clean seat. The food was served with devotion, and the vidheha—one beyond bodily consciousness—sat down to eat.

The naked, sky-clad Avadhūta appeared like the very Lord of Kailāsa Himself. He consumed large quantities of food, yet never once indicated that his hunger was satisfied. When the kitchen's preparations were entirely exhausted, every last morsel was served to him. Only then, after completely partaking, did he belch contentedly, to the amazement of all who beheld the scene.

Nārāyaṇa Svāmī's state was one of complete detachment; he never expressed the slightest desire even for water. The gosāvī himself brought it with care and placed it before him, yet the saint would not take it. Soon after, he rose and went swiftly into the forest, reclining in the shade of a tree and entering deep sleep. The Mahant commanded his disciples to remain there, guarding him.

They filled a water jar and sat close by, but for three days and nights, he showed no sign of waking. On the fourth day, he stirred from his trance. When water was offered, he drank only a little, and then proceeded towards the sacred precincts to display a marvellous act.

In that town, there was a large drain from a certain mansion, from which foul water and stench issued. Before the assembled crowd, Nārāyaṇa Svāmī drank from it—an entire vessel full. Shortly after, the saint made his way to the shrine where learned Brāhmaṇas were engaged in the ritual of laghu-rudra abhiṣeka to Lord Tryambakeśvara, chanting the prescribed Vedic mantras.

The vidheha approached and inquired gently what they were doing. Upon hearing that it was a consecrated bathing of the Lord, he said, “Then let me hold the abhisheka vessel.” Standing thus, he grasped his own organ and, with steady flow, let a continuous stream of water fall upon the Śiva-liṅga. Witnessing this extraordinary sight, the onlookers burst into laughter. The Brāhmaṇas, angered, warned him that their sacred rite must not be interrupted and threatened dire punishment if he continued.

Yet, in spite of their protests, the flow remained unbroken until the laghu-rudra was entirely completed. Realising this was no ordinary man, the Brāhmaṇas began to offer praise, saying, “This indeed is none other than Lord Kailāsanātha Himself, ever established in the state beyond body-consciousness.”

At that very time, a householder from Nāśik had come for the pilgrimage with his family. On the way, his horse had died, and he was forced to halt on the roadside in fear of thieves, unable to proceed. As he sat there in anxiety, Nārāyaṇa Svāmī happened to arrive, and the Brāhmaṇa narrated the misfortune. The saint, smiling, addressed the lifeless horse, “Arise at once!” Immediately, the animal stood up, shaking its ears. The Brāhmaṇa quickly saddled it, loaded it with the baggage, and reached his dwelling.

But the moment the load was removed, the horse once more gave up its life. Thus was revealed the saint’s divine power, indistinguishable from that of the Lord Himself.

For the very Lord of Lords, the consort of Rukmiṇī, who later would reveal the purport of this scripture, had stamped His own seal upon the saint’s surrender. Truly, the mere hearing of the holy Bhakta-līlāmṛta fulfils the innermost desires of the devout listener. This forty-sixth chapter, sweet as nectar, thus comes to its close.

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Chapter 47

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Śrī Gaṇeśa)

O Friend of the helpless, Ocean of Mercy, Beloved of Your devotees, unfathomable Sea of Compassion! O Supreme Lord who has assumed the play-form of incarnation, O Pāṇḍuraṅga, Saviour of the world! Beloved consort of Rukmiṇī, Your glory is infinite, immeasurable, and without end. None can reckon it, for the intellect of all is limited and cannot grasp its extent. Though you are without attributes, without form, actionless and beyond all ritual, yet, to protect and cherish your devotees, you take on a form with qualities and visible beauty. First, you sometimes bestow delusion upon the non-devout, allowing them to trouble your servants, but when the faithful meditate upon You, You swiftly remove their terrible afflictions. Merely hearing of your noble fame can melt the heart of the wicked, transforming their nature; remorse arises, sins are destroyed, and a pure, sattvic disposition awakens.

In the previous chapter was told the beautiful episode of the Brāhmaṇa's horse, which died upon the road and was instantly revived by Śrī Nārāyaṇa Svāmī, to the wonder of all. Such is the marvellous conduct of saints—miracles wrought through Vaiṣṇava power. Though their body appears human, they are verily the Supreme Brahman in that form.

There was once a Brāhmaṇa named Rāmakṛṣṇa, a sage and supreme knower of truth. Having conquered the six enemies of the mind, he considered himself indebted to the Lord, serving Him through worship of Viṣṇu, singing of His glories, and constant remembrance of His Name. His heart overflowed with compassion for all beings, seeing all as his own self. Casting away all worldly bonds, he instructed people in righteousness. His was a divine descent for the uplift of the world in this age of Kali.

When he came to the city of Baroda, he gathered disciples into his order. One woman received his instruction secretly, without telling her husband. Later, her husband learned of it and devised a cunning plan. Pretending to leave the town for four days, he hid himself in the cellar of their house, intending to bring the Guru home through his wife's devotion, observe them together, and then punish them.

But the wife was deeply pious. To her, the Guru was the Deliverer from the ocean of birth and death. She thought, "If I can bring him to my home, I shall joyfully serve him and sanctify my household." She told her friend of her wish, and together they invited the Guru.

The saint, perceiving her husband's absence, at first refused, warning her that if he returned unexpectedly, there might be great trouble. But the woman wept and pleaded, "We women live in dependence. When will I again have the good fortune to serve you? Grant me the blessing of purifying my home." Seeing her pure devotion, the Guru agreed.

She prepared the food with care, brought him to the temple, and seated him. At that moment, the husband emerged suddenly from the cellar, weapon in hand, intending to strike his wife. But when he looked at the Guru seated before him, he saw instead the form of his wife. Astonished by the miracle, his anger vanished, repentance filled his heart, and he fell at the saint's feet. The Guru's form returned to normal, and both husband and wife became faithful servants of the saint. Thus is shown the transforming power of holy company.

Another devotee was Rāmacandra Bhaṭṭa, a great scholar, master of the Vedas and Vedānta, yet entirely free from pride. He engaged in no disputes, but, having destroyed ego, devoted himself to the worship of Śrī Hari. Treating rich and poor alike, he lived on unsolicited alms, protecting his family without earning by worldly means. He performed his daily ablutions and the five great sacrifices unfailingly, and never turned away a guest.

Seeing his steadfastness, the Lord granted him vision. At that time, in Delhi, the Avindha king was building a vast palace. If any humble dwelling stood in his way, he would quickly give the owner funds to rebuild elsewhere. By chance, the wall of Rāmacandra Bhaṭṭa's home collapsed. The king's minister offered to build him a new temple-dwelling, but Rāmacandra, unwilling to be disturbed, left for Kāśī.

Then Śrī Hari appeared to the king in a dream, in the form of the Kāzī, saying, "Rāmacandra Bhaṭṭa is my very life. Bring him back with honour, for only then will you find good fortune." Awaking in fear, the king sent his minister to Kāśī, who bowed to the devotee and begged him to return. The Lord ensured that his dwelling remained, and the king himself came often for his darśana, bowing with love. Thus does the Lord of Rukmiṇī Himself magnify the renown of His servants.

Among the saintly was also a Kāzī named Muhammad, a Yavana by birth, who constantly remembered the Name of God and never uttered falsehood. Even when the emperor sent him wealth, he would not touch it, choosing instead to live by the toil of his own hands. His wife was skilful in embroidery, selling her work in the market to obtain food.

The Kāzī was renowned for justice and fairness; the emperor sent him cases day and night, and he decided them impartially, favouring neither Hindu nor Muslim. To him, gold and earth were alike. He knew that desire for wealth was the root of sin, and so he cast it entirely from his mind, thereby becoming honoured in all the worlds.

Yet he had no sons—only one daughter, who was married into a noble house of Kṣatriya lineage, possessing wealth, horses, elephants, chariots, palanquins, and a retinue of five hundred soldiers, ever in the service of the king.

Thus, as many days passed in the household, a daughter bore a son. But her husband's span of life soon reached its destined end, and he departed for the abode of death. The Hindu revenue officer, who was acquainted with the family, harbored deceitful thoughts and devised a cunning scheme. Concealing all the wealth, he fabricated false debts and set them

down as dues upon the household. In his wicked mind he thought, “First let them settle this debt, then only may they perform the sacred funeral rites in full purity.”

The grieving mother and child, stricken by the calamity, said, “While the master was alive, no such debt was ever heard of; from where now has this burden arisen? This is but false dealing.” At that time, the Sultan commanded his judge, Qazi Muhammad, to investigate the matter. The Qazi, perceiving the injustice, prepared a strange device. The body of the deceased son-in-law was opened, and in place of his entrails, saffron and musk were placed. The corpse was then lifted and swiftly brought before the father-in-law. There, the bereaved daughter and her young son wept in loud lamentation.

Still the corrupt revenue officer persisted in his heartless words: “First settle the debt, then you may perform the pure rites.” Soldiers, bribed by him, supported his false claims, and everywhere people whispered of his deceit. Then Qazi Muhammad declared, “Now shall we hold judgment in this matter.” A great assembly was called, and amidst it all, the daughter wept bitterly. Inwardly, the Qazi knew the truth from falsehood, yet he restrained his tongue, for he thought, “They will accuse me of partiality toward the woman, calling her my own.”

Perceiving the depth of the calamity, the Qazi remembered the lotus feet of Shri Hari and prayed, “O Lord, let no slander touch me; grant me a way to uphold truth.” Then, turning to the corpse, he said, “Rise up for a moment, settle accounts with the revenue officer, and then you may return to the realm of death.” The very utterance of these words opened the door to a wondrous episode — the glorious marvels of the saints, which gladden the ears of all who hear.

As a sleeper rises and sits when awakened, so did the corpse rise and clothe itself in its garments. Twisting his beard and reddening his eyes in wrath, he drew a weapon against the revenue officer and demanded, “Give me my accounts at once!” At this sight, the wicked man trembled and clung to the feet of Qazi Muhammad, crying, “Spare my life!” He confessed, “I hid the account papers, forged a false document to show debt, and seized the wealth for myself.” He revealed even the smallest hoarded amounts, and sought the father-in-law’s permission to release the son-in-law’s spirit.

All who witnessed the wonder were filled with awe. They bowed at Qazi Muhammad’s feet, confessing that the greatness of saints is beyond comprehension. Then the daughter, with her son clasping the Qazi’s feet in love, pleaded, “Save my husband’s life.” But the Qazi replied, “If I restore him today, others will only bring more troubles upon me. Seeing my power, greed will awaken, and that stain I cannot bear.” Saying this, he gave a handful of earth to the son-in-law, who returned to the dust. The daughter’s fame for righteousness spread openly, and many came to behold her.

Six months later, she too departed to the eternal abode. Qazi Muhammad declared, “Now I too must no longer remain in this mortal world.” Gathering the people, he entered into samādhi before them. To this day, for the sake of the virtuous, his living presence is revealed.

A great tiger comes daily to his tomb, brushing it with his tail, and fragrant flowers are laid upon it every day. Though by birth a Muslim, he harmed none; to all beings he bore compassion, regarding them as his own self.

In those days, another Muslim ruler, Balakhbukhari by name, reigned with justice and brought happiness to his subjects. Under his rule no beggar was found, nor did he allow oppression. Yet he was deeply immersed in sensual pleasures, enjoying the fruits of past merit in many forms of luxury. In the course of time, the moment of awakening drew near. Summoning his eight chief ministers, he asked, “Tell me, to which true Guru should I surrender myself?”

The vizier replied, “In Varanasi dwells Kabir, a great devotee and knower of truth, who is proficient in both the Hindu and the Muslim paths. His noble fame is profound; you should go to him for refuge.” One day, Balakhbukhari himself went to Varanasi, bowed to Kabir, and received his grace. Kabir instructed him in the worship of Shri Rama, adding, “In time, you shall also know the cause that will bring you detachment.”

The king had sixteen queens of surpassing beauty, but with them he was wholly attached to worldly pleasures and immersed in royal duties. One day, as he sat in his court, a maidservant was arranging flowers in the royal temple. While conversing privately with a minister, the king was delayed in coming, and the maid, waiting long, was overcome by sleep. Resting her head near the couch, she lost bodily awareness.

When the king entered unexpectedly, he saw her sleeping and became angry. He ordered his servant to strike her four blows with the whip. Yet the maiden laughed sweetly without the least distress. The king, astonished, asked, “Why do you laugh, O beautiful one?” The maid replied fearlessly, “I rested my head upon the bed on which you daily sleep amidst flowers spread in measures of many maunds. For so small a fault, I am struck until blood flows; I laughed to think what punishment awaits those who kill living creatures to fill their bellies. If for touching your couch I am beaten thus, what will be the fate of such sinners?”

Hearing this, the king’s heart melted with remorse. Renouncing his entire kingdom, he left the city. In the prime of youth, with sixteen queens, eighteen lakhs of horses, and radiant health, the lord of the land walked away, saying, “Youth, body, and kingdom are impermanent; I have done nothing yet to make life fruitful. Now I must seek the means to attain Shri Hari.”

So saying, Balakhbukhari set forth alone, allowing none to accompany him, just as King Bharata once abandoned the world-encircling empire to wander in the forest, and as King Bharthari, hearing of his queen’s infidelity, turned to the path of renunciation. Even so, the maid’s wise words awakened dispassion in Balakhbukhari, and he departed.

Free from the afflictions of hunger, thirst, cold, or heat, and unmoved by any such bodily cause for distraction, the saint dwelt ever in a state of perfect renunciation, with all virtues blossoming naturally in him, his mind absorbed in the worship of Śrī Rāma.

It was known among devotees that he was a Vaiṣṇava bhakta of the stature of the great Kabīr, for he had himself received the teaching of worship in that tradition. Thus, adopting the same form in meditation, he daily performed mānasa-pūjā, the inner worship of the Lord.

Thus passed four days, until one day the Lord Himself granted him direct vision. In His beautiful, manifest form, adorned with all auspicious marks, Lakṣmī's own beloved consort came before him in truth.

On another occasion, a certain holy man, beholding the saint, remained with him through the night. That day, the saint encountered a wandering fakir, dwelling in the state of utter detachment. This fakir begged from no one, nor sought the company of any man. Yet when the Lord Himself was in great distress, this fakir would be the one to whom He sent bread.

While things thus stood, it so happened that Balakh Bukhār came to that place. To him, the fakir plainly said, "There is no place for you here. How many days has it been since you took up renunciation?" The other replied, "It is only newly that I have taken the path of yoga."

Through the sure grace of the Sadguru, all entanglements of worldly life had been dissolved, and within eight days, these words proved to be entirely true.

Now, the head of the monastery, troubled inwardly, said to himself, "God sends me two loaves of bread daily. This man will wish to share them; best that I send him away quickly."

Balakh Bukhār, perceiving the newcomer's fresh renunciation, said to him, "Go and stay outside the monastery; that place will be right for you." The ascetic, firm in the discipline of detachment, dwelt there without complaint.

Then occurred a marvellous event. The resident fakir of that spot was sent curry and bread. Balakh Bukhār, though pressed by hunger, felt not the slightest desire for food. Seeing this, the Lord of Lakṣmī resolved to care for him in another manner. Upon the ground there appeared a bejewelled platter, filled with exquisite sweetmeats. Lakṣmī Herself took up a golden vessel and served the meal swiftly before him.

From a distance the monastery head beheld this, and his mind was shaken. "This man has been a fakir for eight days, and I have laboured all my life—yet he receives such bounty! There is no justice in the house of God," he thought. Refusing his bread that night, he lay down fasting.

That very night in a dream he beheld the fakir's form, and the Supreme Lord Viśvambhara spoke: "It was I who sent Balakh Bukhār outside. He has renounced the whole kingdom without desire, and remains steadfast in My worship. Therefore I Myself care for him daily. And you, harbouring desire for a kingdom hereafter, I supply only with bread and curry. Why resent this? The seed you plant in the soil is the fruit you will reap at the end. Each soul receives according to its own good deeds."

Awakening in wonder, the monastery head went at once to Balakh Bukhār and bowed before him with certainty of heart.

Continuing his way, Balakh Bukhār came to a great city, where in a monastery many fakirs resided. Coming before them, they saw his patched robe, his prayer beads, his woollen cloth, yet found no begging bowl at his side. None would admit him within, and he was kept outside.

At length, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha Himself appeared there and declared, “In all the three worlds there is today no devotee more steadfast than this man.” Proclaiming thus, He vanished from sight. The fakirs, astonished, honoured Balakh Bukhār and brought him within the monastery.

Whoever has Śrī Hari as his helper, upon him the whole world’s Lord bestows His grace, guarding him in many ways with the discus in His hand. He never inquires into caste or birth, but seeks only the strength of loving devotion. Balakh Bukhār, by this constant mercy, was met with the Lord’s compassion at all times.

Another steadfast devotee’s tale is also to be heard. This is the meeting of the saint Sārangadhara with a seeker in Kāsvatī. This was the renowned Sheikh Farīd, born of Yavana lineage, the son of a widow. To his mother he once said, “Grant me the vision of God.” She replied, “Has God fallen upon the road that you may pick Him up? To attain Him requires firm resolve and many hardships.”

Indeed, to attain Śrī Hari, saints cast aside all worldly pleasures: some take to the forest in utter detachment; some maintain strict celibacy; some engage in deep penance; some turn within to behold the Self. Some leave worldly life to fast in solitude; some spread the Lord’s glory in song; some sit to hear His praises; some perform noble deeds without desire for their fruit; some take up great vows in Viṣṇu’s honour, keeping vigil for the Lord; some, esteeming others as their own Self, give food and water to the hungry; some are saved by service to saints, never harming any being; some practice the austerity of speech, never uttering falsehood, keeping the Lord’s name ever on their lips; some spend themselves in service to others; some practise yoga in deep meditation; some give away the wealth they have earned righteously to the worthy; and some serve the Sadguru, offering body, mind, and wealth.

Thus are there countless means to attain the Lord, each suited to a soul’s own nature. Which path is dearest to you—take that up with full heart.

Sheikh Farīd said to his mother, “I shall abandon food and wander the forests until I meet the wielder of the discus. But give me one loaf of bread.” She replied, “If you abandon food, why do you ask for bread?” He answered, “For the sake of shelter and satisfaction of mind.”

Taking the bread from his mother, he tied it in the fold of his garment and went deep into the forest, sitting upon a mountain. Though he would never look upon the bread, living

instead on leaves and bark to still his hunger, his heart's only wish was to behold the Lord in a visible form. Yet that vision was not granted at once, and he remained ever restless within.

Unknown to him, the Preserver of the worlds was guarding him. Then an event occurred: some traders, carrying sacks of sugar upon bullocks, passed by. As they went, they asked Sheikh Farīd what he carried. He replied, "In my sack there is only earth." Taking his words to be true, the traders went on to the city—only to find that their sugar had indeed turned to earth.

Seeing this, they lamented, "We know not the strange ways of karma! Because we spoke false words to a holy man, such has been our fate."

Having thus felt deep repentance in his heart, he turned back and returned to the very place he had left. Approaching the company of devotees of Lord Viṣṇu, he spoke gently, "What are you carrying with you?"

In reply, they said, "We have loaded our bullock with sacks of sugar." Hearing this, the ascetic said, "That is most excellent." The merchants, curious, opened one of the sacks before him, and to their wonder, the sugar was still as it had been before. Witnessing such a marvel, he was moved to reverence and fell at their feet with sincere devotion.

Taking a tray, he filled it quickly with sugar and placed it before them. But the valorous Vaiṣṇava, seeing this, ran far away, saying within himself, "The Lord shows such miraculous power before me only to test my mind. But I do not desire this threefold purity of name, fame, and show; why should I accept such a pretentious distinction?"

The bread which his mother had given him earlier, he had kept tied in his cloth. When hunger began to trouble him, he simply plucked and ate leaves from plants. In this way, twelve years rolled by amidst hardship and forest-dwelling, yet the Lord, the Deliverer of the world, did not grant him His vision. Finally, he returned home.

Upon arriving, he bowed instantly to his mother and said, "Mother, I have not been able to meet Śrī Hari. Tell me quickly what means I should adopt." He showed her the bread he had kept all these years. His body was lean like dry wood, his head burdened with matted locks. He said, "So many austerities have I performed, O mother, yet I have not met the wielder of the discus."

Taking a lock of his hair in her hand, his mother began to untangle it. He tried to draw back a little, but she smiled and said, "It is for such small pride, my son, that you have been deprived of the Lord's vision. For this fault, Śrī Hari has not appeared to you thus far."

Hearing this, he bowed to her again and vowed, "From now on, I will never cause harm to any living being." Then he went into the great forest, living only on fallen leaves.

One day, for the sake of a tree, he even suspended his own body from its branch. Fixing his mind with one-pointed concentration upon the Supreme Viṣṇu, he prayed, "O Compassionate Lord, Purifier of the fallen, take care of this poor soul."

Hanging like dry wood from the tree's bough, he was approached by a crow, which began to peck at him. Speaking to it, he said, "O friend, you may break and eat my entire body, but please leave my two eyes, for they yet hope to behold the vision of Śrī Hari." Saying thus, tears streamed from his eyes, his throat choked with love as he gazed upon the dark-hued Lord who had now appeared before him.

The Lord, who had been near in a hidden form, now manifested openly. With His own hands He untied the rope, saying, "You have labored much, My dear devotee. To gain My presence, you have performed austerities for two long cycles." Thus speaking, the Lord of the universe embraced him.

By the Lord's merciful glance, the devotee's body became divine. Shekh Farīd opened his eyes and saw before him the abode of Vaikuṇṭha. Before him stood the dark-blue, four-armed Lord, robed in shining yellow silk, crowned, adorned with earrings, and wearing a forest garland. At the sight of His beautiful lotus face, his eyes found perfect rest.

A brilliant Kaustubha jewel shone on the Lord's chest, the Vaijayantī garland adorned His neck, and anklets glittered upon His feet. Gazing upon this form with unblinking eyes, Shekh Farīd clasped the Lord's lotus feet and worshipped Him with loving offerings.

Having beheld with his eyes the Lord's true form, he treasured it forever in his heart. Leaving the forest, he returned to the temple and, bowing before his mother, said, "By your grace, O mother, I have met the Lord." Joy welled up in her heart, and she replied, "The sign has been fulfilled."

From that time on, the fame of this Vaiṣṇava devotee spread far and wide, and the Lord increased the noble renown of His servant throughout the earth.

Now, listen to another deep and delightful tale. Merely by hearing it, one's sins are destroyed. On the banks of the river Tāpi lies the place called Thārner, where dwelt a brāhmaṇa named Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa. Gentle by nature, full of devotion, and ever engaged in meditating upon Śrī Hari, he lived without worldly desires.

Content in all circumstances, he never sought to acquire wealth or possessions. For him, gold and clay were alike. Firmly fixed in the Lord's Holy Name and Form, he considered all perishable things as poison. At all times he performed his daily baths, worship, and meditation on the Lord, and if a guest came to his home, he honored him as he would Lord Viṣṇu Himself.

Though there was scarcity of food and clothing in his household, he never compromised his virtue. Seeing his steadfast mind, Śrī Hari Himself came in the form of a brāhmaṇa.

One day, when Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa had gone to the river for his daily rites, the Lord of the worlds, disguised as a brāhmaṇa, came to his home and said to his wife, “I am going on a great pilgrimage, but I have with me a Touch stone and no place to keep it safely. As you and your husband are without desires, I have brought it here.”

Saying this, the Lord placed in her hand a piece of iron. As soon as it touched the stone, it instantly turned into gold. Showing this miracle, the Lord said, “Take this stone and fill your home with gold; drive away all poverty.”

He then instructed, “When Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa returns, tell him I bowed to him. I will return after two years to claim the stone. Until then, keep it safe and do not speak of it to anyone.”

Thus speaking, the Lord of Rukmiṇī swiftly departed. The lady of the house, with a heart full of satisfaction, said within herself, “Today, the Lord has indeed fulfilled my desire.” Her husband, the noble Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa, remained constantly in the temple, immersed day and night in the service and praise of the Lord. Though worldly needs were ever-present in the household, the Lord Himself had come to her aid.

On that very day, a stranger had come and touched a piece of iron with the touchstone he carried; the iron instantly turned into gold. Showing her this marvel, he entrusted the stone to her, saying, “Keep this as your own treasure. Make gold as you need, banish your poverty and sorrow, and when two years have passed, I shall return to take it back. Until then, use it for your welfare.”

Following his advice, she converted a small amount of iron into gold, sold it in the market, and purchased fine provisions for the household. That day she prepared a delightful meal in the temple kitchen. She then told her husband, “From this day forward, you need have no anxiety about the needs of the home. Keep the Lord in your heart, and spend your time in His remembrance and worship.”

Hearing her words, the great Vaiṣṇava warrior’s heart melted with remorse. “Alas,” he thought, “by accepting such a worldly attachment, I have allowed a veil to fall between me and Rukmiṇī’s Lord.” Without delay, he asked for the touchstone, and without hesitation cast it into the flowing waters of the Tāpi. Freed from the bondage of possession, he returned home, received the guests, and served them food with love.

Yet his good wife was troubled. “When the man returns to claim his stone, what shall I give him?” she asked. Smiling, Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa replied, “Send him to me at once. If he asks for one stone, I shall give him four. Let not your mind be anxious.” Soothed by his words, she resumed her devotions with joy, fixing her mind on the Lord’s name and form, forgetting all thoughts of worldly affairs.

Thus passed two years, during which he engaged in the worship of Viṣṇu, in singing the Lord’s glories, and in contemplating the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Then, as promised, the Brahmin returned. Coming straight to the lady of the house, he said, “I have come to take back the

treasure I left with you." She replied, "My husband has gone for his bath. Speak to him when he returns."

But the Brahmin was displeased. "Why," he said, "did you tell him of my secret? What need was there to reveal it? One should keep such a matter hidden, like a spotless crystal." Hearing these words, she answered simply, "I could not hide anything from my Lord and Master. I told him all."

At once the Brahmin urged her to come with him to the river to return the stone. Troubled in mind, she went to the Tāpi's bank. There, in a secluded place, Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa sat absorbed in japa and meditation on the Lord with the discus in His hand. The virtuous lady approached him and spoke gently, "The man who left the touchstone with us has returned to claim it. What answer shall I give him?"

Opening his eyes, the saint beheld before him the same Brahmin. The man said sharply, "Give me back the stone at once! Why do you sit here in meditation?" The devotee calmly replied, "I cast the stone into the river, for I have no wish for any worldly bondage; my only treasure is the Lord within."

The Brahmin insisted, "I will not go without the touchstone." Seeing his determination, the wise devotee stepped into the water, took up four smooth pebbles, and brought them to the bank. "Choose your own," he said, "and test it. Each is a touchstone—whichever you take will turn iron into gold."

In that instant, the stranger's form changed. Casting aside the guise of a Brahmin, the four-armed Lord Śrīhari, clothed in yellow silk, stood before them. His lotus face was adorned with a charming smile, His ears with makara-shaped earrings.

Seeing Him thus, the couple's hearts overflowed with love. Together they bowed, worshipped Him with devotion, and embraced the Lord of the Universe. The vision of His beautiful form they stored in the treasure-house of their hearts. The moment His merciful glance fell upon them, the knots of worldly bondage were cut forever.

In the next chapter, the story continues with the Lord of Rukmiṇī granting fearlessness to a certain king and speaking words of blessing. Thus ends the forty-seventh chapter of the Bhakta Līlāmṛta, sweet to the ears of the faithful and fulfilling all the heart's desires.

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Chapter 48

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Śrī Gaṇeśa)

When the age of Kali began, misfortunes multiplied greatly. Fear seized the sages, and they withdrew to the hermitage at Badarikāśrama. The gods of the earth, once protectors, performed strange marvels—hiding themselves even in stone to escape the assaults of the wicked. The great tīrthas themselves seemed reduced to mere water, unable to carry souls across. Seeing that no means of salvation remained for the people, the saints descended upon the earth. They set afloat the boat of the holy Name in the ocean of worldly existence. By merely hearing the chanting of the Lord's Name, people began to taste the bliss of union with Him. In the age of Kali, austerities, sacrifices, and ritual chants lose their power—but the saints' own lives, when sung or heard, remove the disease of worldly bondage.

Thus appeared on earth the heroic Vaiṣṇavas, men and women who turned hearts toward devotion. Merely hearing their life-stories was enough to destroy the sorrows of birth and death. Listening to saints' lives brought joy to the Lord of Rukmiṇī, who watched over His devotees as a mother guards her child.

In the previous chapter, we saw how the Lord gave Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa a touchstone, which he threw into the water rather than be bound by greed. Pleased, the Lord dropped His Brahmin disguise and revealed Himself. In the same way, this new tale speaks of another pure-hearted soul.

There was once a pious devotee named Ratnākara, living in the land of Bāgalāṇa. He toiled day and night in many ways, yet his household needs were never met. There was no grain to eat, no clothing or utensils to use, and debts to many had piled up without hope of repayment.

Weary of worldly troubles, Ratnākara undertook a vow of austerity, fasting and spending his days and nights in the Lord's Holy Name. For fourteen days he continued thus, until in a dream the Lord Himself appeared and said: "Give up all worldly business, and devote yourself to My worship. Even if you try to earn by worldly means, you will not be provided for. Take up renunciation, and I will be pleased with you and with Rukmiṇī."

Awakening, Ratnākara told his wife of the vision. But she hesitated: "If you give up your work, our kin will laugh at us. Living by begging will be shameful." Still, Ratnākara continued his trade—yet even with constant effort, he could not fill his belly.

One year, famine struck the land. Grain became dear, and what little was found sold at high prices. Ratnākara took his four bullocks to a distant place and managed to obtain a single sack of grain. He set out for home, leading the cart through a forest.

But the Lord, to test His devotee, appeared in the form of a wild beast. The frightened bullocks scattered, one sack falling to the ground. Ratnākara was thrown into distress: “The world is already a burden, and now my troubles grow worse. O ocean of mercy, save me now!”

Weeping, he prayed. At that moment, the Lord of Rukmiṇī appeared in the guise of a traveler. He gathered the bullocks, placed the sack upon one, and set Ratnākara back on the right road. Then, in the twinkling of an eye, He vanished.

Realizing who had helped him, Ratnākara was filled with remorse: “Alas! I troubled the Lord of Dvārakā with my needs.” Upon reaching home, he called a Brahmin and gave away the grain, the bullocks, the cart, and all household goods, freeing himself from every tie.

From that day, he lived by the marks of true sāttvic renunciation—serving the Lord without asking anything from anyone, treating rich and poor alike, and singing the Lord’s glories for all to hear. His fame spread far and wide; many were inspired to take up devotion, and even kings honored him.

Wealthy patrons, seeing his detachment, donated freely. In his kitchen, a thousand were fed daily. The Lord showed many marvels through him—whenever he looked at a dry tank, water would spring forth.

One day, the desire arose in Ratnākara’s heart to visit all the holy places of the earth. He journeyed to Vārāṇasī, bathed in the Gaṅgā, and worshipped Viśveśvara. He went to Gayā and Prayāga, offering gifts to the Brahmins. Wherever he went, his songs awakened devotion in countless hearts.

Traveling on, he reached Kurukṣetra, then Hastināpura, where the people hailed him as a divine incarnation. A great festival was held for Janmāṣṭamī; the city rang with music, flags, and processions. The king of Avindha, seeing the glory of the event, offered five hundred gold coins for the Lord’s service.

By the Lord’s grace, devotion blossomed everywhere. At last, Ratnākara set out for Dvārakā, singing the Lord’s holy name at every step, his heart free of all care—whether anyone offered him gifts or not, his joy remained unshaken.

Thus proceeding along the appointed path, Ratnakar soon arrived swiftly at the city of Baroda. The officer there, arrogant and intoxicated with his own authority, beheld him and in his heart felt a surge of anger. “This man,” he thought, “is a Hindu fakir much honored by Ghafur.” In a mocking spirit he sent a large platter filled with meat, saying, “Here is sweetmeat for you—accept it as my prasada.”

His messengers came to Ratnakar saying, “The ruler has sent this confection for you.” They insisted that the platter be returned empty at once. The Vaishnava devotee, troubled in mind, withdrew into solitude and, his heart anxious, cried out to Shri Hari: “O Lord, hasten to my

aid in this peril! Whether my heart be free of desire or tainted with pride, I call myself Yours, O Shripati. Remove my distress in whatever manner You will, for my love for You is pure."

As he lifted the covering cloth from the platter, his eyes beheld, not meat, but fresh jasmine flowers. Distributing them joyfully among all present, he felt his heart consoled. A few flowers still remained, which he sent back to the ruler. Beholding this wonder, the Muslim officer was struck with remorse. "This man is truly a realized devotee of Vishnu," he confessed, "and I have troubled him in vain."

With sincere repentance he came and bowed at Ratnakar's feet, begging forgiveness for all his offenses. He placed at the devotee's feet a thousand silver coins, saying, "Let this be for your palanquin expenses forevermore." Thereafter, the Baroda officer himself provided an escort for Ratnakar's journey. By the grace of the Lord of the universe, all great obstacles were dispelled.

Soon, the noble Vaishnava and his company proceeded swiftly to Dwaraka, where again a marvelous incident took place. At the confluence of the Gomati River and the ocean, a mound of sand had risen like a hill in the midst of the stream. The water, hindered in its course, had become stagnant, and the entire flow had ceased. The once green waters of the Gomati were now breeding worms, and a foul stench arose when any was drawn to the mouth. The inhabitants of that sacred place, deeply distressed, could find no remedy.

Hearing of Ratnakar's wondrous fame, the temple priests approached him, saying, "You are a realized devotee of Vishnu. If you restore the flow of the Gomati into the sea, your pure fame will be proclaimed throughout the world." Ratnakar, hearing of this calamity, felt hesitant in his heart. Standing before the Lord, he prayed with love: "O Lord of Dwaraka, O chief of the Yadavas, in vain have men heaped upon me the burden of such renown. I know nothing of past or future deeds; I am only ever absorbed at your feet."

Then, as in a vision, Rukmini's Lord said to him, "If you bathe in the Gomati, the stream will surely resume its course." Filled with joy at this divine assurance, Ratnakar set forth at midnight for the river. The townsfolk, eager to witness the marvel, accompanied the heroic Vaishnava to the banks. As soon as he set foot into the water, the mound of sand dissolved and drifted away. All beheld the wonder with astonished eyes.

When Ratnakar bathed in the river with a heart overflowing in devotion, the waters became pure and clear without end, and the current flowed forevermore by the mercy of the deep-blue Lord. Seeing this, the people of the place proclaimed, "This is verily an incarnation of God Himself!" Bowing before him with reverence, they returned to their homes. Ratnakar then entered the temple and, offering his prayers to Shri Hari, said, "O Dwarakadhish, today you have granted honor to one so helpless as I."

After remaining there for a fortnight, he resumed his journey towards Svasthala.

At that time, there lived in Surat a Vaishnava devotee named Madhavdas. Constantly engaged in loving remembrance of the Lord's beautiful form, he regarded all beings equally—whether friend or stranger, king or pauper. Gold and dust were alike to him, and he lived without worldly desire.

On every Ekadashi, he would hold a night-long kirtana in praise of Hari, worshipping Vishnu without ceasing, and gathering many souls into the path of devotion. Visitors who came for his darshana would bring sugar before him, and he would distribute it to all by the handful, regardless of the quantity brought—be it a quarter-pound, a pound, or even a maund, it would suffice for everyone present. Witnessing this miracle, people were filled with astonishment and some whispered, "He must know the Sabari mantra, by which the sugar multiplies," while others scoffed, "It is but false show, aided by the Lord."

Thus in the world some praised and others criticized, yet Madhavdas neither rejoiced at the praise nor grieved at the blame. "When Hari fills the hearts of men," he thought, "Why should there be any cause for sorrow?" and his mind remained content in love.

One day, a malicious man, bent on mischief, filled a pot with ashes, sealing its mouth, and brought it to the temple, saying to Madhavdas, "This pot contains sugar. Distribute it yourself among all." Without suspicion, the devotee first offered it to the Lord, and when he opened it, his hands drew forth pure sugar, which he gave to everyone. Stricken with remorse, the deceiver confessed openly before the people, "I had brought only ashes in this pot, yet behold—by his touch they have turned to sugar!" Falling at the saint's feet, he begged forgiveness and joined the path of the Lord's devotees, forsaking all worldly entanglements.

When news of this spread, the king of that region, being of a cruel and unbelieving nature, devised a harsher trial. He placed a great venomous serpent in a sealed pot and sent for Madhavdas. When the saint arrived, the king presented the vessel, saying, "I greatly wish to receive sugar from your own hands—please distribute it at once." Unsuspecting, the devotee opened the pot and found within it only sugar. Offering it first to Shri Hari, he distributed it to all present by the handful.

Seeing this wonder, the king was filled with repentance, bowed to the devotee with true reverence, worshipped him with gifts of garments and ornaments, and seating him in a palanquin, took him to the Vishnu temple. There he said, "If you have any wish in your heart, tell me, and I shall fulfill it." Madhavdas replied, "I have no desire for anything. All things are perishable, and the hoarding of them is vain."

Beholding the steadfastness of the saint's desirelessness, the Prince of the Yādavas returned to His own abode. The renown of Madhavdās had now spread far and wide; yet, forsaking all pride, he prepared to set out once more towards Dvārakā. But Providence willed otherwise. A multitude of pilgrims joined him on a journey, their hearts overflowing with love and devotion, singing the Lord's praises as they went along the path.

Presently they came to a vast and dense forest, where towering trees cast deep shadows, and the air was still and heavy. Suddenly, before their very eyes, there appeared the world's most fearsome creature—a mighty tiger. At the sight of the great beast, with its terrible face and sharp fangs, all the travellers trembled. Panic seized them; life itself seemed to flee their limbs, and they ran in all directions to save themselves.

But Madhavdās, whose heart saw but one Lord in all beings, stood unmoved. Seeing the tiger rushing directly toward him, the devotees scattered, hiding themselves wherever they could find shelter. Yet the saint, without fear, advanced. Then, in that very moment, the World-Soul revealed His true intention. Casting aside the tiger's guise, He manifested in the four-armed form of Śrīpati, adorned with shining earrings and radiant yellow garments.

This was none other than that very form of Lord Viṣṇu, described by Vyāsa in the scriptures. Madhavdās beheld the Saguna form just as it is revealed in sacred meditation. The Vanamālī, Lord of the forest garland, embraced His devotee tenderly, then seated him at His own lotus feet. Bliss beyond measure filled the saint's heart. Yet he inquired, "O Hari! Why did You assume the form of a tiger? Why this terrible appearance that caused the pilgrims to flee?"

The Lord, smiling, replied, "I desired to meet you in solitude. Therefore I took this guise to scatter the crowd. But you, fearless hero among Vaiṣṇavas, ever worshipping Me with steadfast love—I met you here on the road, leaving My Dvārakā behind. Now, My beloved devotee, return to your own abode. I give you no command to come to Dvārakā, for it is My wish that you abide by My word. Seeing the purity of your devotion, I have revealed Myself here on the path. Having granted you this meeting, I now bid you to go back."

Thus speaking, the Consort of Rukmiṇī vanished instantly, leaving the inner chamber of His devotee's heart overflowing with divine sweetness. Meanwhile, the other pilgrims, still shaken by fear for their lives, remained hidden in the distant hills. To them, the tiger had vanished completely. In forsaking the company of this saint, they had lost the blessing of the Lord's presence. Speaking among themselves, they said, "It was Madhavdās who faced the tiger—Śrī Hari must surely have protected him. If we seek to meet him now, we might ourselves face death!"

At that moment, Madhavdās called to them with affection, "The tiger has run away far from here—come quickly now!" Marvelling at his escape, some said, "How did he survive?" Others answered, "Surely Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself was his helper. As one who turns venom into nectar, what harm could a tiger do to him?"

When they gathered around, they asked him to recount in detail what had happened. But the saint, wise and humble, said, "Such matters cannot be spoken plainly. As a mother turtle, though far from her young, watches over them with her mind, so is the experience of the devotee—felt inwardly, not told in words. As a child tastes the sweetness of sugar but cannot explain it, or as the chataka bird drinks the rare nectar of the moon yet tells no other bird how it tastes—so is the grace of Śrī Hari. By His mercy alone can the loving heart know the

truth. Today, Śrī Hari has granted me His vision. This I know by my own experience alone. But He has forbidden me to proceed to Dvārakā, and so I shall now return."

While the pilgrims continued their journey to the city of the Yādavas, Madhavdās swiftly reached his home, and once again immersed himself in loving worship—Vishṇu-pūjā, the singing of Harikīrtana, and the upliftment of many souls through the path of devotion.

Now, in the region of Bedar, there lived a steadfast devotee named Viṭṭhal Purandara. His story is most wondrous. Though he had wife and family, he remained inwardly detached from worldly entanglements, wholly devoted to the worship of Pāṇḍuraṅga. In the midst of his daily affairs, his mind dwelt constantly on the Lord. Never did falsehood pass his lips; compassion filled his heart toward all beings. Whenever a guest arrived, he would offer food to the best of his ability, even though his own household suffered many difficulties.

Year after year, he would undertake the pilgrimages to Paṇḍharpur in the months of Āṣāḍha and Kārtika, holding fast to this vow in firm resolve. Yet, on one such Kārtika occasion, he was suddenly struck with a severe fever. His body became frail and strengthless; the very thought of walking seemed impossible. Yet his longing for the Lord's lotus feet burned ever stronger. "If I could but reach Paṇḍharpur once and offer myself, let this body fall there!" he thought.

For three days and nights he tossed in restlessness, unable to sleep, the fever raging. His mind whispered, "This body is perishable—why cling to it? My life rests only at the lotus feet of Viṭhobā. If death is to come, let it find me on the road to my Lord." Resolving thus, he rose, determined to depart at once, accompanied only by his wife.

With no horse to ride and the fever still upon him, each step was a struggle, his very breath faltering. Yet they pressed onward until they reached a small village, where they rested for the night. There, seeing her husband so weak and silent, without any sign of recovery, the wife broke into loud weeping. "Surely Rukmiṇī's Lord has turned away His grace!" she cried.

Then, opening his eyes a little, Viṭṭhal Purandara said, "Lay me swiftly upon a cot and carry me towards my Lord in Paṇḍharpur. If my eyes can behold Him once, my life will be fulfilled."

At his request, four attendants came forward, ready to bear him. But his wife's mind was troubled—there was not a single coin left for the journey. How could she arrange for what was needed?

With no means left for travel expenses, and nothing to give the porters, a heavy worry weighed upon her heart. In that hour of helplessness, she turned to Lord Pāṇḍuraṅga with all her soul and cried, "O Lord of Paṇḍharī! O God of gods! O Keśava! Save me now. You are the Friend of the forsaken, the Ocean of compassion. Saints and the righteous speak of you thus – that at the mere utterance of Your Name, all obstacles melt away. If that be so, let not their word be proved false."

She thought of the temple left far behind, and of the four-storeyed shrine in Paṇḍharpur. Fever had overcome her dear husband – what could she possibly do now? In such a plight, she called again: "O Rukmiṇī's beloved! O Śrīhari! O steadfast Vithṭhala Purandara, worshipped by the pilgrim's heart!"

Thus did the good lady weep in that moment. Hearing the cry of His devotee, the Lord of the Discus hastened to her side. Disguised as a humble farmer, Śrīhari appeared before her dwelling without delay and asked gently, "Mother, why do you grieve so deeply? Speak to me at once."

She replied, "Father, hear my trouble. My husband has been struck by illness. We managed to reach two storeys along the way, but now he has collapsed. Fever has taken full hold of his body; he cannot even take a step. The pilgrimage party has gone far ahead. Tell me – what can be done?"

Hearing her words, the Bearer of the conch and discus said with swiftness, "My village is Paṇḍharpur itself. I will go there quickly. I have three companions waiting outside; we came here upon hearing your cry and have run to see you. We will seat your husband in a palanquin and carry him straight to Paṇḍharī. Let your heart be free from worry now."

The Lord's words brought a deep sense of relief to her soul. She said, "If you will show me such kindness, it will be a boundless merit in this world." At dawn, the Lord of the Universe Himself made ready, and taking on four forms of His own, He lifted the palanquin. Seating Vithṭhala Purandara within, the Lord Rukmiṇīkānta Himself bore the weight upon His shoulder, the Soul of the Universe carrying the burden of His devotee.

Even the greatest yogis, absorbed in eightfold meditation, do not easily behold Him – and yet here was the Supreme Lord, carrying a palanquin through the world's highway. I marvel at this wonder! The same Jagannātha, who cannot be moved by endless sacrifices, austerities, or vows, personally undertook the task for His devotee – the Protector of the helpless, the Friend of the poor. He who is formless, beyond all qualities, beyond change, and whom even the Vedas and śāstras cannot fully fathom, here assumed a form of qualities, visible to the eye, bearing the weight of His bhakta. The Creator of the universe, the Father of all, the Lord Śrīhari, took on human form and carried His devotee upon His own shoulder.

Remembering His Yogamāyā, Śrīpati lightened the journey, so that in a single stretch they reached Paṇḍharī by evening. There, by the banks of the Chandrabhāgā, the great pilgrimage had gathered. Countless devotees roared the Name of Vithṭhala, swaying in love as they sang His praise. Hearing this jubilant sound, the Lord Purandara felt joy in His heart, just as a dying man rejoices when the life-giving mantra enters his ears.

Loving Vaiṣṇavas, intoxicated with devotion, sang the Holy Name in kīrtana, holding aloft banners, marching in bliss. Amidst that blessed gathering, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha gently set down the palanquin. He brought all their belongings to the lodging and arranged everything.

Then, going to the temple, Rukmiṇīkānta brought sacred water and offered it to Vithṭhala Purandara, who drank, still somewhat weak from his illness.

Taking both husband and wife by the hand, the Lord led them into the sanctum, giving them His own darśana and placing a coconut in offering. Gazing upon the dark, cloud-hued beauty of the Lord, tears flowed freely from their eyes; their throats choked with love, and they embraced Him with both arms. Bowing their heads at His feet, they said, "By the fortune of destiny, we have seen your lotus feet." The joy in their hearts overflowed beyond measure.

They also took darśana of Satyabhāmā and Rukmiṇī, and the saints engaged in kīrtana, whom the Lord also pointed out for their blessing. Seating them at their lodging, He said, "Now rest here. In the morning I shall return."

They asked, "Tell us your name, so that we may remember you and repay our debt of gratitude – though we see no means to truly do so."

The garland-bedecked One replied, "My name is Pāṇḍuraṅga Koḷī. My children and kin all live here. This is my dwelling place." Vithṭhala Purandara said to Him, "We come here in Āṣāḍhī and Kārtikī – keep us in your remembrance and meet us then."

The Lord of the universe replied, "I am ever in your presence, though you may not know Me. Whenever you remember Me in your heart, I shall come to you at once." Saying thus, Śrīhari vanished instantly.

For seven days the joy of the festival continued, and on the full moon day they beheld the Gopāla-kalā celebration. Strength returned to the devotee's body, and he was completely healed. Husband and wife went to the temple for darśana of Pāṇḍuraṅga; their eyes brimmed with tears, and they set forth to take leave, performing circumambulation of the holy place. At every moment they remembered the great kindness of Pāṇḍuraṅga Koḷī. Whenever they recalled Him within, Śrīhari Himself appeared in that very form, blessing them on their way.

Before leaving, Vithṭhala Purandara said, "We shall meet again in the month of Āṣāḍha." Hṛṣīkeśa replied, "Surely! You must certainly come to Paṇḍharī."

Thus speaking in this manner, he returned once more to the sanctum, his heart marked with the seal of the Lord's intimate grace. In many wondrous ways did the Supreme One reveal His affection for His own devotee.

At that very hour, Śrī Viṭṭhala, the Lord of Purandara, accompanied by His consort, returned to His abode. Yet within the devotee's mind, Śrī Hari ever remained seated in deep meditation; moment by moment, thoughts of Paṇḍharī arose in his heart. Whether eating or drinking, walking or resting, lying down or taking repose, engaged in household duties or worldly occupations, his soul continued to worship the Lord of Paṇḍharpur.

The more he remembered Viṭṭhala, the more his love increased, until his entire being took the very form of that remembrance. When the month of Āṣāḍha arrived, he would, with great joy, set out for Paṇḍharī. Reaching there, he and his wife would begin seeking Pāṇḍuraṅga in all places, searching diligently through every corner. But at that time, the Lord could not be seen.

The devotee thought within himself, "My life's very soul, my dearest Friend, carried me on His shoulders and brought me here. But now, having brought me to Paṇḍharī, He has gone far away, and I cannot find Him anywhere." Husband and wife wandered through the holy precincts, searching intently, yet nowhere could they find a trace. And so the day passed into evening.

As the night hours wore on, both remained fasting, their minds fixed upon the Lord. Seeing the plight of His dear ones, the Lord of Paṇḍharī resolved, "I must now grant them My darśana." Taking on His manifest, beautiful, saguna form, He appeared before them, saying, "It was I Myself, as the fisherman, who lifted you upon My shoulders and brought you here."

At that sight of the Giver of Liberation, their hearts were filled with supreme bliss. They embraced the Lord, and placing their arms around Him, bowed to His lotus feet. Then the devotee spoke: "O Lord Viṭṭhala, O Purandara, this perishable body—by which You carried me on Your shoulders—how can such a small service ever repay You?"

Hearing this, Pāṇḍuraṅga smiled and said, "If one abandons the perishable, how can one ever be joined with the Imperishable? Tell Me that! You have bound Me with your body, speech, and mind through constant remembrance; now, let us complete the offering and partake of food without delay. For in this holy place of Paṇḍharī, the home of saints, the rule of fasting does not apply." Saying thus, Śrī Hari returned again to His temple.

In truth, as is the feeling in the devotee's heart, so does the Lord of all gods manifest Himself. For the sake of His devotee's distress, He revealed an incomparable tenderness. When the soul is weighed down by a heavy burden and the devotee's resolve remains unshaken, the Lord Himself comes to give darśana—though to others He may remain unseen.

When Duryodhana persecuted the Pāṇḍavas and sent them to exile, they never abandoned their steadfastness, but ever remembered the Supreme Kṛṣṇa in their hearts. When Sudāmā, the poor Brāhmaṇa, endured great hardship, he still remembered the Lord's lotus feet, and his poverty was soon removed. When Prahlāda was tormented in countless ways by his father, not for a moment did he waver in his bhajana; seeing his unshakable determination, the Lord of the universe appeared at once from the pillar.

Now, enough of further discourse. When the body is heated with fever, still Purandara set out on pilgrimage, and thus came to meet His Lord, who is the consort of Goddess Rukmiṇī. In the next chapter, a deep and wondrous episode shall be told—let the listener give full attention. The king's noble words should ever be treasured by the virtuous.

Thus concludes this forty-eighth sweet chapter of the sacred Śrī Bhakta Līlāmṛta—a scripture which itself fulfills the heart's desire by the mere act of hearing.

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Chapter 49

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Lord Ganesha)

Infinite, immeasurable, and dark as the raincloud is He, whose divine plays are without number. Upon each pore of His cosmic form rest countless universes like so many garlands. The sun and moon are but the twin eyes of that Supreme Being. He is the soul of all creation, greater than the twenty-one heavens and the seven nether worlds combined. Though the Vedas proclaim Him in their threefold wisdom, even the Creator, Brahmā, remains as a mere child before Him, unable to fathom the full extent of His being. He alone brought forth all that is, moving and unmoving, yet none can truly know the limit of Śrī Hari.

When this boundless, all-encompassing form is contemplated, even then the true devotee may not perceive its vastness. Therefore, in the sacred town of Paṇḍharpur, He stands manifested in a visible, embodied form, the bestower of liberation. His posture is charming—graceful and youthful, with both feet firmly upon the brick. His two hands rest upon His waist, and His countenance is most pleasing to behold. With eyes filled with love, He gives immediate audience to His faithful. The garland of tulasī adorns His neck, and His gaze is fixed straight ahead, steady as the tip of His nose.

It was the great service of Puṇḍalīk that brought this Lord of all worlds down to earth, that mankind might approach Him in devotion. Therefore, He is called by the name Viṭṭhala, and the salvation of the world has come through Him.

In the earlier episode, we heard of the supreme devotee Viṭṭhal Purandara, whom the Lord Himself bore upon His shoulder to show the holy city of Paṇḍharpur. Now we shall speak of another—the illustrious Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī, the great saint, who was the very incarnation of Lord Dattātreya, descended to earth for the redemption of the world.

There once lived a learned brāhmaṇa, who had no son. By the merit of his former deeds, the son of Atri, Lord Dattātreya Himself, was born in his household. At the sight of this beautiful and virtuous child, the parents were filled with joy. Twelve days having passed, they named him Nṛsiṃha. At the age of five, after the sacred thread ceremony, he was instructed in learning.

It so happened that, upon opening a scripture, he could recite it flawlessly from memory. The father marveled at this and said, “What vast intellect my child possesses!” Some declared, “This is none other than the incarnation of the sage Aṅgiras,” while others said, “It is Vyāsa himself who has appeared among us.” In truth, there was none upon the earth who could equal him. It seemed that Sarasvatī, goddess of learning, dwelt upon his tongue; thus, his name became Nṛsiṃha Sarasvatī.

By the age of eight, he was already a master of the Vedas and Purāṇas, as if the very sun of knowledge had arisen in brāhmaṇa form. Yet his mind remained withdrawn from the world;

he dwelt in contemplation, often alone in the forest. He spoke little, avoided idle mirth, and cared not for hunger or thirst. Seeing these signs, his parents grew concerned, for though they had long prayed for a son, his mind was turned away from worldly life.

One day, his father said, “You spend your time alone, avoiding all worldly affairs. Why do you not live as other men do?” The son replied, “The very word ‘world’ is but a deception, like the horoscope of an unborn child, like a mirage appearing as the ocean, like wealth seen in a dream. All such things are unreal. Realize your own true Self, and life’s purpose will be fulfilled.”

But these words did not enter the father’s heart, for the veil of attachment blinded him. Just as a mirror cannot reveal one’s face to the blind, or music bring joy to the deaf, so too the deluded mind turns away from the path of the Self.

At last, the son said, “Grant me leave to go to Vārāṇasī.” Hearing this, tears filled the father’s eyes. “We have no other child,” he said. “If you go, who will tend to us in our old age?” Nṛsiṃha replied, “You shall have two more sons, and a virtuous daughter who will uplift the family line. This is my truth to you.” Bowing to his parents, he departed for Vārāṇasī and took the vows of a sannyāsī, thereafter known as Śrīpāda. Casting aside his staff and water-pot, he became a paramahaṃsa, and all revered him for his extraordinary wisdom.

Many came to see him; householders grew in devotion, the virtuous acquired divine qualities, and renunciates of knowledge and detachment became his disciples—three hundred in all. After a year, he returned to his native land, blessing all who came to him with single-minded surrender. The fame of his lineage grew, numbering in the hundreds.

Arriving in his homeland, a great stir arose; multitudes came from afar for his darśana, and many were set firmly upon the path of devotion. Though possessed of all eight mystic perfections, he used them only to relieve the distress of those in need.

In time, journeying onward, he came swiftly to Gaṇagāpur and took up residence there with his disciples. On the banks of the Amarajā Gaṅgā he bathed daily, and pilgrims came from far-off lands to behold him.

But among the learned brāhmaṇas of that place, there arose envy. “Without passing through the householder’s stage,” they said, “he has taken sannyāsa, and even discarded the staff, wandering about unclad among the people. He has abandoned all dharma.” Gathering five hundred in number, they resolved to confront and disgrace him.

Yet the Lord’s will is wondrous. As they advanced, a mighty whirlwind arose, filling the air with dust so that none could see clearly. In that moment, all their garments were swept away, and they stood exposed, each gazing upon the other in shame.

In the assembly, there were elders and youths alike, each checking discreetly with their own hands whether the mark of manhood remained upon them. None dared laugh at another, for all shared the same fate, bound by one common plight. Witnessing such a wondrous

happening, they were filled with deep remorse, realizing that they themselves had maligned the Master. Now the cause of their humiliation was laid bare before their eyes.

They thought within themselves, “When we return to our homes, the people of the holy place will mock us. They will say, ‘You have been shamed.’ And what answer could we possibly give?” They pondered on the strange workings of karma, now finding themselves in disgrace before the world. Some said, “Let us cast aside our pride and surrender ourselves to the Master.”

Thus, they hastened to the presence of Shri Narasimha Saraswati, their hearts filled with true devotion. With deep sincerity, they began to praise Him: “Victory, victory to Thee, O embodiment of the Supreme Brahman, who hast taken birth upon this earth in the form of an Avadhūta! Thy greatness is such that even the sacred scriptures are humbled, unable to fully describe Thee. As spittle cast upwards falls back upon the very one who cast it, so has our own insult returned upon us as our punishment. Forgive us, O Lord, for our offence.”

Hearing the Brahmins’ grief and contrition, compassion arose in the Master’s heart. He immediately instructed Siddhas to bring forth new garments and give them to the shamed ones. Witnessing this miracle, all the Brahmins prostrated before Him and, having sought His permission, returned to their homes. From that time onwards, they bore Him no ill will, not even in the least.

The Master then related another marvel to His devotees. One day, without His disciples’ knowledge, He went swiftly to the bank of the Amarja River and entered its waters to bathe. Plunging beneath the surface, He remained there for four full hours. A fisherman saw this and wondered, “Why has the Master taken so long? Could it be that a crocodile has swallowed Him?” With this in mind, he peered into the water, and what he beheld was a wonder indeed.

Before his eyes, seven celestial sages (Sapta-rishis) stood in the water, and there was a divine temple, radiant and glorious. The sages had taken the Master into their abode, where they worshipped Him with every honor and offered Him rich food. The fisherman stood at the doorway, watching in awe. When the worship was completed, they offered the Master betel leaves for mouth-refreshing, and then, coming out of the temple, He saw the fisherman waiting.

Upon inquiring of him, the fisherman narrated all that he had seen. The Master then instructed him, “Tell this to no one.” Yet, out of gratitude, He gave him a pot full of gold coins, saying nothing further about the reason for this gift. The fisherman, overjoyed, proclaimed to others that the Master had, out of compassion, freed him forever from the sufferings of poverty.

There was yet another Brahmin in that place, weakened by want, with not even enough to feed his household. Still, his mind was calm and steadfast. One day he came to the Master, bowed his head at His feet, and with folded hands prayed, “Have mercy upon the destitute,

and please come to my home for alms." The Master, with nectar-like words, replied, "I shall come when the occasion is fitting."

Hearing this promise, the Brahmin went home and told his wife. Yet the day and date were not fixed. One day, at the time of preparing food for the household deity, the Master suddenly appeared. The Brahmin, overjoyed, welcomed Him with love and offered Him a seat. That day, the only preparation in the house was a simple cake made of flour and jaggery. Inwardly troubled, the Brahmin thought, "Had I known beforehand, I would have procured better offerings."

His wife lamented likewise, "If only there had been warning, we could have made proper arrangements." Then the Brahmin thought to offer the Lord a preparation made from milk. But alas, the only cow tied in their courtyard had been barren for twelve years and had never given milk. The Master said at once, "From this day forward, she shall yield milk and never again be dry." To the astonishment of the Brahmin, when he milked her, she gave eight seers of milk on the spot.

The Master drank the milk preparation with delight, accepted a tulsi leaf for mouth-purification, and then gave His command: "Tomorrow, invite seven hundred of My disciples and all the Brahmins of the village. You shall also prepare sweetmeats sufficient for twenty-five persons, and fear not—by this means all will be fed without shortage."

The next day, invitations were given to all. The villagers marveled, whispering among themselves, "This man cannot feed his own family—what game is this he plays?" Yet, at the appointed hour, the Master came with His seven hundred disciples, and five hundred village Brahmins also gathered. Food was served to all, and though the preparation was measured for only twenty-five, it sufficed for everyone. All recognized this as the Master's divine power.

When the meal was ended, betel and dakshina were given to all present. There was even food left over, which was distributed to other castes. The Brahmin's poverty vanished from that day, and his home was filled with prosperity.

In that town, there was also a washerman who daily came for the Master's darshan, worshipping His deity form mentally in deep meditation. After many days thus passed, a thought arose in his mind—he wished to rule the kingdom of Vijapur. Even as the thought formed, the Master appeared before him and said, "I know the desire in your heart—tell Me without hesitation, and I shall fulfill it at once."

The washerman said, "Lord, such is my wish—but how could I attain it?" The Master, pleased, replied, "I can grant it to you now." But the washerman, mindful of his old and frail body, said, "Lord, I am aged, and the enjoyments of a kingdom would be wasted on me. Grant me instead that in my next birth I may obtain this desire." The Master said, "So be it. In your next life, you shall have this kingdom, and when you remember Me, I shall appear before you without delay."

Having spoken thus, the Master vanished from sight. The washerman, who was present there, suddenly met his death and was freed from the bondage of the body.

In due course, the Yavana king of Vijapur was born once more, entering the womb for the sake of his destined rebirth. Being blessed with a son, the royal household rejoiced. From the moment of his birth, there was unbroken festivity, and as the years passed, he grew in strength and wisdom. In his sixteenth year, he was enthroned as the rightful ruler.

Yet, as he became entangled in sensual indulgence, his mind lost all remembrance of the Master. For this reason, pain and affliction arose in his limbs. Physicians were summoned from all quarters to restore his health, but no medicine could relieve his suffering. Days passed in anxiety and restlessness.

One night, as the king lay asleep, a dream unfolded before him. He remembered in vivid detail the events of his previous birth. As soon as the memory of the Master entered his heart, a vision of the Divine appeared. The words he heard were: "A great Paramahaṁsa will come to you in the morning. He shall remove this dreadful disease."

Awakening from the dream, the king summoned his chief minister and told him all that had occurred. He instructed, "When that saintly one arrives, receive him with the highest honor."

The next day, at midday, the Master manifested before the king. The monarch, placing his head reverently at the Master's feet, was at once freed from all illness.

The Avadhūta then counseled him with great compassion: "O King, be not intoxicated with the power of the throne. Do not oppress the poor, the helpless, or the orphaned. Protect the cows, the brāhmaṇas, and uphold dharma at all times. Punish the wicked and the cruel, so that your reign may be truly fruitful. Day and night, remember Śrī Hari with love. Show hospitality to Vaiṣṇavas, brāhmaṇas, and guests who come to you for refuge."

Hearing these words, the king entreated, "Revered Master, grant me the boon that I may behold you again." The Avadhūta replied, "You must come to Kāśī. There I shall meet you without delay." Saying this, he disappeared from view.

With deep repentance in his heart, the king set forth on pilgrimage. Reaching Ānanda-vana, he bathed in the holy Gaṅgā, and remembering the Master, was granted His vision once more. At that moment, the Master instructed: "Remain in Kāśī for the four months of Cāturmāsya. I shall go to the banks of the Amarajā and return thereafter. In my absence, place my sandals here and worship them daily." Speaking thus, he vanished again.

The king obeyed the command and stayed in Kāśī for the sacred period. Then, journeying to Gaṅgāpur, he came to the banks of the Amarajā, where he had the Master's darśana. Returning to his own land, he ruled with righteousness, endowed with noble qualities. In a former birth, it was by the merit of having beheld the saints with love that he was now blessed to be born as a king.

In Gaṅgāpur, the Master addressed all his disciples, saying: “My personal darśana will soon be difficult to obtain. Therefore, establish my sandals here and worship them regularly.” With these instructions, he disappeared.

On the banks of the Kṛṣṇā lies a village named Kurundavāḍ. There the Master manifested to reveal unprecedented wonders. Men and women, beholding the Satpuruṣa, came for darśana, and those who made vows before him found their desires quickly fulfilled.

There was once a barren woman who resolved in her heart, “If I am blessed with a son, I shall bring him to the Master’s presence.” Soon she conceived and bore a virtuous son. But when six months had passed, the child suddenly died. The grieving mother lifted the lifeless body and declared, “I will show the cause of this to the Master.” Bringing the child before him, she beheld the miracle—by the Master’s mere presence, the infant came to life. Overcome with joy, she bowed to the Avadhūta.

Another incident occurred: a certain wealthy merchant died unexpectedly. His wife, renouncing worldly attachment, prepared for the funeral journey. As she came near the Kṛṣṇā River, she saw the Master from afar and, moved with devotion, bowed before him. He at once blessed her. She said, “O Avadhūta, my husband has passed away. I go now on his final journey, casting aside all worldly ties.” The Master, pleased, said, “Your husband shall surely rise again.”

When she reached the bier, her husband sat up alive, exactly as the Master had foretold.

Thus, by the banks of the Kṛṣṇā, the Avadhūta drew many into the path of devotion. Then, becoming invisible, he granted darśana to none. For the upliftment of the world, he had taken a manifest form, but such is the greatness of saints that ordinary men cannot comprehend it.

Now hear another sacred tale. In that land lived a great brāhmaṇa, Mahā-Mudgala Bhaṭṭa, a learned scholar deeply versed in the Vedas and śāstras. Though endowed with vast knowledge, he was utterly free from pride. Even the most eminent scholars became subdued in his presence, yet he never sought to engage in debate. His heart was filled with compassion for all beings, seeing the entire world as his own self. Never did a false word cross his lips. His mind was fully disciplined. He lived without exploiting others, treating king and pauper alike, unbound by worldly hopes, dwelling in complete detachment.

Every day, Mudgala Bhaṭṭa would rise at the proper hour, perform his sacred bath and twilight prayers, and complete the five great daily sacrifices with due devotion. Whenever a guest arrived, he would receive him with reverent hospitality, honouring him with pure-hearted service.

In his home were ancient deities of Śrī Rāma, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, and Śatrughna, which he worshipped with constant devotion. In his heart dwelt Śrī Rāma; in meditation, it was Śrī

Rāma; in waking and in dreams alike, it was Śrī Rāma whom he beheld. For him, Śrī Rāma filled the villages and forests, and indeed pervaded the three worlds.

To his eyes, his sons, friends, and wife all appeared as forms of Śrī Rāma. His mind was immersed in the Lord, and all his senses were absorbed in this fullness of divine presence. Living without seeking more than what came of its own accord, he accepted whatever little food or clothing was obtained, and by this alone maintained his household, his mind ever content.

When Śrī Rāma's birth festival came, he would hold a great celebration in his home. For ten days he would feed the brāhmaṇas with abundant sweet preparations and perform food offerings for peace. Learned brāhmaṇas, such as the venerable Mudgala Bhaṭṭa himself, would arrange all the required materials, while pious devotees gathered. Saints, elders, and Vaiṣṇavas filled the place with kīrtana and the sound of the Lord's name.

On the tenth day, after performing the concluding ceremonies with beauty and reverence, he would honour the Vaiṣṇava devotees. Thus passed many such days, until a wondrous event unfolded. Once, with his household, he set forth on a great pilgrimage, leaving one son at home to continue the daily worship of the deities.

With his wife, another son, and daughter-in-law, he took horses and attendants, and proceeded to Kāśī. There he bathed in the Gaṅgā at Bhāgīrathī, worshipped Viśveśvara, the Lord of the Jyotirliṅga, with heartfelt devotion, and after completing the daily rounds of pilgrimage in Kāśī, felt great satisfaction.

Desiring to return home by the festival of Rāma Navamī, he departed at once, visiting on the way the holy places of Gayā, Prayāga, and Ayodhyā, his heart filled with joy. At Gayā, he performed the prescribed baths, offerings, and devatā worship in proper order. In every kṣetra, he fulfilled the sacred observances as they were meant to be done.

Thus, swiftly completing the pilgrimage, the Vaiṣṇava devotee set out for home. On the way, a wise and pious householder, learning of the arrival of such a devotee of Viṣṇu, considered it a blessing and received him with full honour. Performing the proper worship, he offered garments and ornaments, and also contributed wealth for the celebration of Rāma Navamī in Mudgala Bhaṭṭa's house.

Accepting these offerings, Mudgala Bhaṭṭa continued on his journey. Along the way, other loving devotees too offered him gifts—some even placing sacred tulasī leaves with deep faith, others giving abundant wealth.

At that time, some thieves learned that he now carried considerable valuables. Conceiving an evil plan, they decided to follow him, saying to one another that they would strike in the forest, bind him, and take away the goods. Thus resolved, they moved stealthily behind him.

Mudgala Bhaṭṭa, wise though he was in the Lord's ways, had no idea of their intent. Only one knew—Raghunātha, the indwelling Lord of all hearts. For Bhaṭṭa's mind was such that

he neither cherished possessions nor feared their loss. He never thought, “This wealth must be guarded.” To him, whether one gave or took away, whether one spoke ill or offered praise, all was the same; his love was fixed on Rāma alone.

Free from all anger and desire, he had stored within his heart the dark-blue Lord, cherishing the one thought—Śrī Rāma is everywhere. Yet, the merciless thieves, holding weapons and harbouring cruel intent, pressed on to harm him and seize his possessions.

Knowing this, Śrī Raghunātha, Lord of the universe, assumed a form in disguise to protect His devotee. For when His servant is in peril, He does not consider time or circumstance—He appears in form, dispels every obstacle, and rescues them.

Śrī Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, and Śatrughna took on the forms of mighty bowmen and appeared swiftly on the path. Mudgala Bhaṭṭa, walking with his family in loving devotion and singing the Lord’s praises, was now guarded by these four divine warriors.

Bharata and Śatrughna went ahead with bows and arrows in hand, while Śrī Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa followed behind, protecting the devotee with tender care.

To the eyes of the thieves, these four, radiant and fierce, appeared as formidable guardians. Their eyes shone red with wrath, their presence blazed like fire, and their forms filled the forest path. At this sight, fear rose in the hearts of the robbers. Speaking among themselves in hushed tones, they wondered how such guardians had come to be following the devotee.

Whether behind or ahead, the four guardians would never let themselves be far from him; if ever there was a threat to his wealth, they would immediately seize the goods and safeguard them. They did not relax their vigilance for even a moment—day and night they kept constant watch. When the valiant Vaiṣṇava would sleep, they would remain awake through all four watches of the night. In their minds, the thieves marvelled and wondered how such an arrangement could be made.

One day, the thieves openly questioned the bowmen, “Up to where are you travelling with him?” Hearing this, Raghunātha replied, “We are in the service of Mudgala Bhaṭṭa, a pilgrim. We shall escort him safely to his home, and only then return to Ayodhyā.” But the thieves could not comprehend who this Raghunātha truly was—the very Inner Soul, the Redeemer of the world, who calls Himself a servant of His devotees.

He whose divine form is enshrined within the heart and worshipped in solitude even by Lord Śaṅkara Himself—such a Lord had now become the humble attendant of His devotee! This wonder stirred within their hearts. Still, the thieves thought, “Tomorrow or the day after, he will be without them. Then we shall take his wealth at once.” Nourishing such hope, they followed him along the banks of Gaṅgā.

When Mudgala Bhaṭṭa entered the temple, the bowmen followed him inside. And then—suddenly—they all vanished from sight. The thieves stood dumbfounded. As the sun sank below the horizon, they came down from their hiding place and quickly approached Mudgala

Bhaṭṭa. With feigned devotion they greeted him, saying, “Was your pilgrimage completed safely, by the grace of Raghunātha?” Yet even as they spoke, repentance began to stir in their hearts.

They whispered among themselves, “This man is a devotee of Viṣṇu. Surely the Lord Himself has been guarding him. We tried many devices, yet could not lay hands upon his wealth.”

Meanwhile, Mudgala Bhaṭṭa hastened home, offered full prostrations to the deity, and beheld the adorned deity with joy. As he prepared to offer food to the Lord, he saw the thieves standing at his doorway. They said to him, “We have accompanied you this far; now come and share with us a simple meal of greens and bread.”

Thus, at their request, food was brought from his house and offered to them. As soon as they partook of that sanctified meal, a transformation came over them—their evil intentions melted away. They bowed to Mudgala Bhaṭṭa and asked, “Those four attendants whom you had—why do we not see them here? They were of handsome form, each with bow and arrow in hand, guarding you day and night.”

Bhaṭṭa replied, “I have never engaged such servants. Who are you in truth? Tell me at once.”

They confessed, “We are thieves. We followed you from afar, intending to rob you. But there were always those four guards protecting you. When we asked them once where they were going, they said they were your attendants, and that their home was in Ayodhyā. We saw them until you entered your house. Hearing this, we realised—you are one favoured by the Giver of Liberation.”

Hearing their words, Mudgala Bhaṭṭa fell at their feet and said, “You have seen Śeṣa-śāyī Himself! There is no limit to your good fortune. You are blessed Vaiṣṇava devotees; thus did Raghunātha appear to you. I am but a fallen wretch in truth, yet He hides Himself before me.”

Then he took up his bundle of wealth and, placing it in their hands, said, “Do not return home empty-handed—accept this as the Lord’s gift.”

They replied, “Those were none other than Śrī Rāma’s brothers—Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, and Śatrughna—each assuming the form of a bowman to grant you their darśana. Hearing this, a deep repentance arose within them. They said, ‘We are sinners of evil mind, yet by your company we have been saved. Had we deceived another in this manner, we would surely have fallen into dreadful hell. But through your company, we have seen Śrī Jānakī’s Lord with our own eyes. We have no need of your wealth—it is enough that in your company we have been made pure.’”

Closing his eyes, Mudgala Bhaṭṭa then offered praises unto Rāma: “Victory, victory to You, O Raghunātha, O most generous Giver of Liberation, Beloved of the blue-throated Śaṅkara! Come swiftly and grant me Your presence. O You who always meet even thieves, bearing bow and arrow in hand—tell me, O Lord of Jānakī, of this strange destiny of mine!”

Thus, with words soaked in the nectar of compassion and love, he composed a hundred Āryā verses in the divine language. And then, the Giver of Liberation Himself appeared before him.

Śrī Rāma, along with Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, and Śatrughna, manifested in solitude within the home of His devotee and granted him the supreme vision. The blessed Mudgala Bhaṭṭa beheld the Lord's embodied, transcendental form with his own eyes, and treasured that vision forever within the casket of his heart. For when a true devotee falls into distress, the greatest of the gods themselves hasten at once to protect him.

It so happened that during the sacred festival of Śrī Rāma Jayantī, saintly elders and holy men gathered in the home of Mudgala Bhaṭṭa. The temple resounded with the auspicious music of conches and the chanting of the Lord's Name, and a great celebration was underway. Daily, there was the feeding of brāhmaṇas, and each night the air was filled with the songs of kīrtana in glorification of the Lord.

Yet during that time, affection for the Lord's service had so overtaken him that he would not turn his mind to anything else; there seemed no other course for him. But should something be purchased from the market, there was grave danger from the watchmen of the court. If a man or woman was found walking at night, the guards would seize them without cause. Those who came to hear the kīrtana would remain there for all four watches of the night, and at daybreak they would return to their homes.

Now, while this was so, the lamp-oil in the temple began to run out. Mudgala Bhaṭṭa, the devotee of Śeṣa-śāyī, thus found himself in a pressing difficulty. At that moment, the Lord Himself—Sītāpati—assumed the form of Bhaṭṭa's own student. In that guise He went to the home of the oil-seller, placed a ring as a pledge in her hands, and said affectionately, "Please give me a full jar of oil, and I will return in the morning to redeem this with payment."

The oil-seller agreed, and the Lord carried away a jar filled to the brim, pouring it into the temple lamp with His own hands. Then He seated Himself amidst the company, and the uproar of kīrtana continued joyfully throughout the night. The devotees remained awake through all four watches, until at last the auspicious dawn arose and the maṅgalārati was performed. Sītāpati was offered the waving of lights, and then the sacred food offering was distributed among all the listeners. As the people returned home, the rays of the sun touched the earth.

Then the oil-seller came to Mudgala Bhaṭṭa, bringing with her the pledged ring. She said to him, "Last night, your student gave me this as security in exchange for a full jar of oil. Now, please give me the payment due, and return my property." Hearing these words, Bhaṭṭa was astonished and turned inward in wonder. When he questioned his students, they all replied, "We know nothing of this matter," though indeed the jar of oil was visible in the house. This only deepened his amazement.

In his heart, Mudgala Bhaṭṭa understood, “This is the doing of Śrī Rāma Himself.” Taking the ring, he placed it reverently in the Lord’s shrine and worshipped it with great love.

The later chapter tells of further marvellous and wondrous pastimes, narrated by the revered guru Rukmiṇīkānta. It describes how even kings, bearing the Lord’s seal, sought the refuge of His saints. Thus ends the forty-ninth chapter of the Bhakta Līlāmṛta—a sweet and fulfilling chapter, granting delight to loving devotees merely through its hearing.

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Chapter 50

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (Salutations to Lord Ganesha)

Hail to The Protector of the helpless, Lord Pāṇḍharīrāya! Your Vaishṇava compassion is unwavering and unfailing. By the mere utterance of your holy name, even the most ordinary and humble devotees are enveloped in the shelter of your boundless grace. Those who seek no other refuge, who exhaust themselves in various spiritual practices, find that all their efforts become binding unless they remember You, O Pāṇḍuranga. Even the most fallen and ignorant, should they chant Your sacred name with sincerity, receive Your devotion as their steadfast support, and enjoy a liberation that transcends worldly attachments. When one beholds the splendor of Your divine opulence, even Indrā, goddess of the heavens, feels humbled within her heart, and then remains ever at Your feet, meditating upon Your sacred form with rapt attention. The glory of Lord, surpassing even the gods, leaves the eyes and ears of mortals awestruck; one's admiration for the lotus-born Lord knows no bounds. In attaining You, the supreme of the world, even Lord Śiva, burdened by distress, finds relief. The continuous remembrance of Your holy name consumes all mental agitation and stabilizes the mind. Even the adept in the eightfold yoga cannot endure the gaze of such devotion, yet You, O Lord, stand firm, arms folded, steadfast and awe-inspiring. For the innocent and unlearned, You reveal Yourself directly, granting them the divine vision. When Pundalik beseeches You for the boon of world salvation, it is through Your grace that the deliverance occurs. You Yourself proclaim the fame of Your devotees, O Lord of Rukmini, and though my understanding may be limited, this truth settles firmly in my heart.

Knowing Your refuge, I began the composition of this text, intending to complete it with devotion and humility, free of pride. The chapters were meticulously studied by a noble and pious Brahmin, Mahāmudgalabhaṭṭ, whose sincerity was shielded even by Lord Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa from any obstacle.

Alongside him, a single virtuous Vaishṇava, steadfast in devotion, realized the essence of bhakti, surrendering entirely to Lord Raghunanda. On the banks of the sacred river Tāpi, in the holy town of Punyanagara, the devoted Vaishṇavas dwelled, engaging tirelessly in the service of the Lord.

During the day, Brahmins of noble character, endowed with utmost virtue and simplicity, remembered Your holy name, uniting love and devotion in constant remembrance. Even though they lived amidst worldly duties, their hearts remained unbound, detached yet serene, and devoted wholly to saguna bhakti. Their humility, renunciation, and other divine virtues were manifest in their lives, as they worshipped the sacred forms of Śrī Rāma, Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa daily.

They led lives of simplicity, accepting whatever food and clothing came their way, yet showing profound hospitality to saints, thus protecting their households. Compassionate to

all beings, devoted in worship, and pure of heart, they avoided even the slightest touch of falsehood. At night, they gathered in joy for the recitation of Your glories, with devotees arriving from far and wide to listen and participate in heartfelt devotion.

Their aim was the welfare of the world, as they embraced the teachings of saints and avatars, remaining untouched by the threefold impurities of the material world. Like the omnipresent soul that pervades all creation, the devotees acted to purify the fallen and uplift humanity, manifesting divinity through their human forms.

Saint and God are indistinguishable to those who perceive them; just as the sun and its rays cannot be separated in essence, so too is the name and essence of the Lord inseparable. One must examine one's own position, proclaim one's own fame, and cultivate devotion in the heart, keeping the desired Lord ever in mind.

For this reason, devotees, filled with divine love, sang of His glory ceaselessly. Even the most ignorant and dull-hearted, by hearing these accounts, attained liberation. The Brahmin Jāsvant, steadfast in devotion, listened daily to the Lord's glories, recounting tales of bhakti and virtue. Devotees from surrounding villages—Brahmins, women, and even Shudras—gathered nightly, fully attentive, leaving worldly distractions aside to find spiritual rest.

Days passed as these stories were recited and heard; for seven continuous days and nights, it rained without pause, inundating the entire land. Rivers overflowed, deluging the villages, causing widespread alarm. Yet Jāsvant, a true Vaishṇava warrior, remained serene, invoking Lord Raghunanda in prayer to dispel the calamity.

Those who sang His glories unceasingly, acknowledged the truth of His deeds. Even when naysayers and evil-minded men spoke disparagingly, Jāsvant, moved by devotion, swiftly entered the temple. Closing the doors, he prostrated before the deity with tears of devotion, offering concentrated praise to Raghunanda.

"Glory to You, Lord of Ayodhya, the Lord of divine plays, the protector of the universe! May You ever be the refuge of Your devotees," he prayed, recognizing the eternal imprint of Your grace upon the three worlds. When the entire village was threatened by floods, Jāsvant, invoking the solar dynasty incarnation, took immediate action. By Your name, O Lord, even the stones parted upon the waters, and the river's surge was checked, sparing the villages from total destruction.

O Lord of the universe, my heart fears not death, yet I cannot bear to witness the suffering of Your devotees. With tears in his eyes, the devoted Jāsvant turned his mind fully to You, realizing that all anxiety is unnecessary before Your mercy. When the floods reached the banks of the river Tāpi, Hanumān swiftly descended to secure the villagers, acting upon Your divine instruction.

Thus, by Your divine presence, Raghunanda remained ever in the hearts of His devotees. Even lifting massive statues of metal, Jāsvant placed them securely on the riverbank,

protecting the people until the waters receded. Wherever the waters rose, Hanumān stood firm, and the villagers beheld this miraculous safeguard with awe.

Then Hanumān acted with unwavering courage, thrusting his gaze upon the raging river, and with a single word, he brought it to rest. The sound resounded powerfully, and the waters halted, their roar stilled. In his colossal form, the Son of the Wind stood, commanding the entire river to obey. At once, life returned to the land, and the astonished villagers witnessed the miracle with their own eyes.

All the vessels that had been swept away by the flood, scattered across the wilderness, were instantly restored, leaving the people in awe. Joyful cries of victory and devotion arose from the assembly of devotees, who proclaimed the glory of the Lord in this dark age of Kali, hailing the divine descent upon the earth. Women and men of the villages came before Jāsvant, offering respectful salutations, and with hearts brimming with devotion, greeted Lord Raghunanda with joy.

Hanumān, in his mighty form, restrained the overflowing river, showcasing the greatness of the saints and their divine protection, inspiring all with his power and devotion. On such occasions, the villagers declared that the supreme Lord Raghupati had truly manifested before them. Even if some doubted, considering the event impossible, the water gradually receded over three days, leaving the villagers amazed.

The divine metal deity that had withstood the flood remained firm, demonstrating the certainty of divine providence. Countless sacred icons were scattered across households, yet they could not withstand the floodwaters, reminding all to reflect upon the impermanence of material objects.

Among them, one wise and devoted soul, recognizing the miraculous act, ensured that the devotees could witness this sacred event. Though the river was mighty, he reminded them that true strength lay in devotion, not in begging or worldly efforts. Skeptics voiced doubts repeatedly, but the faithful knew that even Lord Rāma could not be swayed by worldly disbelief.

First, the wicked had tried to harass the devotees, but the divine narrative demonstrated the saintly glory, strengthening their faith. Just as Prahlāda, the devoted servant of Lord Vishnu, remained steadfast under Hiranyakashipu's torment, and Draupadī was protected from Duryodhana's schemes, so too was the river's fury subdued by the grace of Rukmini's Lord.

Through the previous accounts, it was clear that Maruti had quelled the floods along the river Tāpi. Those who doubted the divine truth were shown miraculous demonstrations, leaving no room for disbelief. The sacred deity of Hanumān, set upon the riverbank, drew the eyes of all, inspiring awe and devotion. From the navel of the deity, a continuous stream of water flowed, yet the deity itself remained unscathed, as the waters passed through four openings in its form, continuing unabated for four days and nights. Villagers watched in wonder, their hearts uplifted by the divine spectacle.

The malicious and envious were struck with realization, and soon, all bowed with devotion at the feet of Jāsvant, acknowledging him as a steadfast Vaishṇava warrior and a living incarnation of divine grace. By his yoga, the entire village was preserved from calamity. The metal deity of Hanumān, endowed with saguna, channeled life into the waters, revealing the extraordinary power of devotion and leaving the crowd in amazement.

Daily, Jāsvant worshipped Lord Rāma, embodying His divine form, and the saintly deeds of the devotees spread through the villages. The site where the waters had flowed through the deity remains to this day, a sacred place with visible marks of the miraculous passage. In the Nandurbar region, his descendants continue to preserve the tradition, maintaining the deity and its veneration.

The narrative is rich with devotion: a single devoted soul, a pure-minded master, worshipped the long-armed Lord. Along the banks of the Narad-Bindu and Surakar-Pura rivers, he resided, chanting the holy names, spreading sanctity throughout the land. Niranjan Swami, detached and contemplative, embodied compassion for all beings, regarding the world as his own self.

He bathed and worshipped daily, performing puja to Lord Ganesha with devotion, yet never sought to see other deities directly, recognizing that the spiritual essence surpasses the physical form. Like the chātaka that drinks only from the purest waters, and the chakora that regards only the moon, he devoted himself solely to the worship of the sacred.

His dedication drew admiration even from learned Brahmins, who came to witness his devotion. Performing rituals with utmost care, he honored the deity of Ganesha with all traditional offerings. Observing a contradiction in scripture regarding the worship of Shaligrāma, he nonetheless proceeded to honor it, lifting it with reverence. Holding the Shaligrāma, his heart filled with the utmost concentration and devotion, he recited hymns and composed a spiritual text, inviting devotees to hear and imbibe the teachings with love.

He sang a sacred abhaṅg, pledging: even if my body is destroyed in devotion to You, O Lord, I shall never abandon my bhakti. Whatever pain may afflict me, I will endure, yet my heart shall remain steadfast in You. Even if the mind grows cruel, my inner vision will never leave the remembrance of Your holy name. Even if Your form is not fully visible in meditation, I shall never forsake contemplation of Your name.

Thus, Niranjan Swami, devoted to the One Lord, never abandoned his devotion. Following this abhaṅg, he spoke two more verses, emphasizing the same truth: the sages, ascetics, and innumerable divine beings may test or challenge him, but his meditation upon the Lord remains unwavering. Even if the skies thundered and the earth trembled, he resolved firmly never to deviate from devotion.

Witnessing the unbroken devotion of Niranjan Swami, the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha was pleased. The Shaligrāma, a sacred form of Vishnu, remained inviolate. Learned saints and Brahmins gathered, astonished by the wondrous tale, clapping and praising the Lord with joy. They

bowed to Niranjan Swami, recognizing the perfection of his devotion, and the sacred Shaligrāma became manifest as the form of Gajānana.

Just as a single-minded devotee worships Lord Śaṅkara, so did he place the deity of Pāṇḍuranga above it. The omnipresent Lord, the soul of the universe, accepted this devotion, responding not through visible form but through the hearts of His devotees. In perfect understanding of Yashodā's love for Krishna and Arjuna's desires on the battlefield, the Lord fulfilled the wishes of His devotees.

Thus, seeing the devotion of his followers, Niranjan Swami offered the Shaligrāma with love, immersed in the worship of Gajānana and Pāṇḍuranga, demonstrating the profound power of steadfast devotion.

A man of extraordinary self-knowledge, endowed with deep spiritual insight, saw the plight of many and yet turned the entire temple through the power of the sacred name. Though the essence of Brahmavidyā and worldly learning was widespread, the floodwaters touched the metal deity of Hanumān, revealing a miraculous truth that defied ordinary comprehension.

Without devotion, no one attains true spiritual realization, just as countless guests may enter a house, yet fail to partake of its sustenance if they remain detached. Recognizing this, a fortunate saint established worship grounded in saguna devotion, guiding aspirants toward direct experience of the divine. The narrative of these saints, rich in spiritual meaning, was presented to attentive devotees.

Among them was Jayarāmaswāmi of Vadgaon, who met Rukminī's Lord and asked earnestly about the nature of devotion. With patience, he explained the principles, sharing them carefully with attentive listeners.

A Brahmin named Krishnadas, noble, virtuous, and devoted, practiced daily worship of Lord Vishnu with love and dedication. Though he lived a householder's life, his actions were exemplary, demonstrating both worldly duty and spiritual devotion.

Circumstances required him to arrange a marriage. He went to serve in the army, where he encountered a village plundered by thieves, leaving the people in despair. Among the affected were women and men fleeing, until he arrived at the home of a Brahmin, where he observed a maiden of extraordinary beauty. Respectfully, he arranged her marriage and brought her back to his own village.

As days passed, and the seasons changed, the appropriate rituals and ceremonies were performed. The woman, of noble lineage, came under his guardianship and was fully integrated into the household. Though societal prejudices existed, Krishnadas recognized her true character, establishing a mark of propriety and ensuring her welfare. Tears of relief and gratitude filled his eyes, as he had sought her for years—two long years passed before this fortunate meeting.

By a sudden turn of fate, mother and child were reunited, the mother overwhelmed with emotion, holding her offspring tightly. Some neighbors came, yet Krishnadas discreetly maintained propriety, sitting nearby while the Brahmin officiated the marriage. Such were the mysterious workings of karma, written by the Lord, moving even the hearts of the most devoted. Tears of emotion flowed as the mother recounted the story, and the couple exchanged words of love and respect. The woman, now fully accepted, was seated respectfully, and the marriage was completed with ritual propriety.

The world, however, is filled with skeptics. Malicious tongues criticized the union, mocking the sanctity of the event. They called the Brahmin of the age blind to virtue, accusing him of indulgence in worldly affairs. Yet despite these judgments, Krishnadas continued his life with steadfast devotion. He upheld the sixteen rites of passage meticulously, performing each act with reverence and without attachment to praise or criticism.

Even as scornful eyes sought to wound him, his inner heart remained unshaken, tears flowing in devotion as he recited the holy names. He recognized that sins of countless past lives had culminated in his present human body, yet he maintained a spirit of penitence and remembrance of the divine. Reflecting upon these truths, he offered respect to the Brahmins, pledging service and surrender, and resolved to live entirely in devotion.

Despite the decay of knowledge, age, and social corruption, he relied upon the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha to lift him from worldly mire. He instructed the Brahmins, chanting the holy names with love, performing kīrtan at night, reading scriptures and the Dnyāneshwarī, and partaking in pilgrimage during the months of Āṣāḍh and Kārtik to Pandharpur. With humility and reverence, he greeted saints and ascetics along the way, observing continuous compassion and service to all living beings, free from self-interest.

At night, the sound of kīrtan resounded, drawing devoted men, women, and children who listened with rapt attention. Dharamar, observing Krishnadas, spoke gently, emphasizing devotion to Krishna and the importance of remembering the holy name. Following these instructions, even small efforts became acts of divine grace. Krishnadas served his household with care, maintaining propriety and distance, fulfilling his duties without malice or attachment.

He and his family performed atonement for past deeds, rectifying errors of previous lives, cultivating humility, and practicing devotion without pride. With each passing day, he completed the prescribed sixteen samskāras with diligence, earning the respect of the community. Even in the face of mockery or misunderstanding, his heart overflowed with tears of devotion, and he remained steadfast in remembrance of Lord Hari.

Thus, through countless lifetimes of effort, Krishnadas's devotion was perfected. The accumulated wisdom of the ages, combined with sincere penitence, culminated in spiritual awakening. Fully immersed in divine remembrance, he honored the holy names, worshipped

with love, and observed the ways of the saints, embodying the ideal of unwavering bhakti, humility, and selfless service.

Without delay, the sound of cymbals and mṛdaṅga resounded daily, filling the evenings with kīrtan. The Brahmins observed their daily ritual baths and continued their worship faithfully, just as before. In this steadfast devotion, his reputation for sanctity spread far and wide. Though he spoke modestly, the listeners received his words with reverent attention.

Accompanied by his beloved spouse, a Brahmin arrived at Pandharpur, naming his son Jayarāma—a child marked by noble qualities and a disposition full of devotion. After ritual baths in the sacred Chandrabhāga River, they received the darśan of Pundalik, and performed circumambulation of the sacred grounds, proceeding toward the Mahādvār.

Over the Garuḍapārī, in heartfelt reverence, he offered obeisance, witnessing the divine forms of Viṭṭhala and Rukmiṇī. His heart was enraptured, and though he remained a householder, he experienced profound detachment, savoring the joy with the association of Lord. For several days, he remained immersed in this bliss, eventually attained the lotus feet of Supreme Lord.

His parents had carefully nurtured detachment in Jayarāma, and his heart remained steadfast in love for Śrī Pāṇḍuranga. He declared: "O Rukmiṇī's Beloved, you are my true parents; without you, no kin or ancestral deity is real. You alone are my family, my dearest confidant; in all three worlds, none is certain to me but You."

Moved by this compassion, he witnessed divine visions across time, hearing the sacred names and engaging in kīrtan with sincere love. One day, while listening alone to the reading of the Purāṇas, he experienced the greatness of serving a true guru, which deeply captured his heart. He resolved to follow the guidance of the guru, allowing the devotion sown in his mind to grow.

After knowing about the glory of guru from the Purāṇas, he performed the prescribed rituals. Bathing in the Chandrabhāga River and offering worship to Pundalik, he completed four hours of circumambulation that evening, arriving at the Mahādvār to offer respectful salutations. A young ascetic of tender frame brought satisfaction to the assembled saints, resting his head at their feet and fixing the divine forms in his mind.

On Ekādaśī, he fasted, and throughout the night engaged in the chanting of Hari's holy name. Listening attentively to kīrtan for four prahars, his heart overflowed with loving devotion. Saints and devotees received him with respect, and he constantly recited the sacred names, leaving no moment idle.

With diligent observance of the rituals, he wished for the darśan of his guru, and whenever he experienced longing, tears of love filled his eyes. Days passed, and with the accumulation of virtuous merit, the Lord of Pandharpur appeared in his dreams, revealing his blessing. He

beheld the vision of Rukmiṇī's Beloved, Krishna, declaring: "Your devotion is recognized; thus shall your grace manifest."

Filled with joy at this miraculous vision, he bathed in the Chandrabhāga river, received the darśan of Viṭhoba, and reverently bowed at the Lord's lotus feet. He prayed: "O Lord of Rukmiṇī, may all attachment and ego be removed from my heart; let me proceed under your guidance without obstruction." Tears of love flowed as he repeatedly prostrated at the Mahādvār, moving through the sacred pathways of Pandharpur with deep devotion.

Returning to Vadgaon, he entered the guru's hermitage and offered eightfold obeisance, overwhelmed with joy at witnessing the divine vision. His soul rejoiced at this divine encounter, as though the promise of the Lord had been fulfilled. Meeting the Brahmin son, he experienced sudden bliss, and even the doubts of sage Dvaipayana were resolved through the darśan of Narada.

Through these events, he narrated to his beloved the significance of ritual observances performed at Pandharpur, acknowledging the Lord's command to seek refuge in the true guru. With head bowed and hand extended in blessing, he received grace, and the words of Jayarāma astonished Krishnadas, who marveled at the power and authority vested by the Lord.

He declared that the honor given at Pandharpur was not to be wasted, and that one must act in accordance with dharma, even correcting past errors and performing penance as instructed. Harboring no resentment, he withdrew from worldly attachments, building a separate hermitage where he engaged in constant bhajan. Witnessing the devotion of his guru and recognizing the true path, he surrendered fully, receiving initiation and grace to worship Krishna with complete dedication.

With body, speech, and mind fixed on service to his guru, he established unwavering love, abandoning all dualistic notions. The story of his devotion spread throughout the villages, demonstrating the power of sincere bhakti. Even the most skeptical observed the unfolding of divine grace, affirming the path of true devotion.

The wise and discerning guru, abundant upon the earth, guided his disciples with steadfast instruction. Even the corrupt and fallen found refuge in him, for his teaching carried the power to purify hearts. Just as water in a polluted vessel cannot be sanctified, so too, without proper guidance, no action could yield purity—but under the guru's instruction, all became transformed.

The devoted Brahmin, nurtured by his family, sought the counsel of a trustworthy teacher. He refrained from idle speech, practicing restraint and humility. Jayarāma, the true disciple, was resolute in his devotion, serving his guru with unparalleled fervor, abandoning all dualistic notions of self. Even when the Brahmins had been previously slighted or cast aside, he remained steadfast, refusing to allow personal desire to sway him.

Attentive to the guru's darśan at all times, he engaged in service with love and diligence. He cleaned the temple meticulously, preparing all necessary arrangements, and in the early morning performed ritual baths, polishing the temple vessels until they gleamed. He presented them with his own hands, ensuring nothing was neglected, all with deep reverence and devotion.

In accordance with the teachings of the yogis and his guru, he performed service with undivided love. Daily, he worshiped at the feet of his master, offering his service willingly. His poetic talent blossomed in devotion; through kīrtan and hymnody, he sang praises with joy. Speaking the sacred words of the abhangs, he brought delight to all listeners, spreading love and devotion through his gentle speech.

Even the simplest devotees, moved by his bhakti, bowed continually in reverence, while the learned scholars who had not yet witnessed such devotion marveled at the depth of his life and character. One day, Śaṅkarācārya himself appeared unexpectedly. All the Brahmins assembled to receive his darśan, offering eightfold obeisance. In the ensuing service, meals and worship were conducted, yet some deemed improper were gently corrected, ensuring proper observances were maintained.

A Brahmin named Jayarāma, a devoted disciple, had absorbed the guidance of Nāpik, serving day and night with joyful love. Even the authorities of dharma recognized his conduct, and his obedience to his guru's instructions pleased all, raising his prestige and ensuring proper discipline prevailed. At Krishna-dās's monastery, Śaṅkarācārya's attendants were promptly summoned to Jayarāma, and through his service, divine grace manifested.

Observing the disciple's devotion, the great teacher reflected: "Truly, this is the gift of the Lord. The grace of Nāpik has been received in the proper manner." Scholars of all varṇas recognized his learning, and even the fallen sought refuge in his guidance, accepting discipline when necessary. With reverent humility, he offered obeisance, acknowledging that the guru is the embodiment of Śrī Krishna himself, and that surrender to such a master is the path to liberation.

Śaṅkarācārya, marveling at this scene, saw Krishna himself in the form of the guru. His heart filled with wonder, he observed Jayarāma performing eightfold devotion, bowing with love, and realized the extraordinary nature of his service. He declared: "Blessed is your loving devotion! Krishna's form is surely manifest in Krishna-dās. Through this devotion, all may witness divine grace."

The Brahmin, freed from prior restrictions, now served joyfully. The teacher's guidance was universally acknowledged, and Jayarāma's fame for piety and service spread widely. His devotion inspired countless others, and through these sacred acts, divine presence and grace were continuously manifest.

Thus, the sacred narrative of the disciple, his guru, and Krishna-dās unfolds—a story of devotion, service, and divine grace, recorded in the hallowed text Śrī Bhakta Līlāmṛta,

bringing fulfillment to all who listen and devotion to all who follow. This chapter, the fiftieth, encompasses the essence of love, service, and surrender in its fifty-three sections, preserving the eternal teachings for devotees.

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Chapter 51

Oṁ śrīgaṇeśāya namaḥ (In the name of Śrī Gaṇeśa)

Hail to You, O Protector of the orphaned, Śrī Paṇḍharīnātha, O ocean of mercy, Rukmiṇī's beloved! O Father who manifests universally from the lotus, grant me the grace to recount the stories of your devotees. It was by your extraordinary will, O Lord of Rukmiṇī, that this text was composed by my humble hands, so that the glory of your servants may be revealed and celebrated throughout the three worlds. Just as one wields the broom to sweep the dust from a courtyard, I have narrated these tales under your guidance, O Paṇḍuranga.

Sheltered by the faith of the devotee, the seeker clings to You, O Lord, for the worldly existence is blind and bewildering. Yet, through Your grace, O Śrī Hari, I have spoken these words in devotion, and now they flow forth, spreading the fame of Your devotees throughout the universe.

Devotees, listen attentively, for the story that follows is like churning curd to extract butter—the hidden essence emerges when the devotion is ripe. Even the most arduous labors of agriculture, nurtured by countless rains, ultimately yield the blessed harvest. In the same way, through Paṇḍuranga's grace, the field of Bhakta Līlāmṛta ripens with devotion, and the divine acts of devotees are revealed.

The chapters recount the lives of the illustrious, including the devoted Bōdhalaya and the pure service of Nāpik, as well as the venerable Krishna-dās and Jayarāma, who served their gurus with profound respect. Miracles were revealed even to Śaṅkarācārya, who witnessed these acts of devotion.

In Dhāmaṇgaon, Mānkoji Pāṭīl, a loving devotee, sang praises of Paṇḍuranga with a heart detached from worldly desires. His beloved wife, a devoted and virtuous partner, embodied perfect devotion, and through their combined love and renunciation, they advanced spiritually. Their first son, named Lakhamoḍji, followed in his father's footsteps, and the second, Yama, was similarly endowed with love for devotional kīrtan. Their children grew in virtue, raised amidst the sounds of devotional praise, clapping and singing in harmony with their parents' love.

The story narrates how Bōdhalaya, a devoted soul, displayed extraordinary generosity. With care and humility, he distributed grain from his fields and prepared offerings with his own hands for the Lord. Body, mind, and wealth were dedicated entirely to Paṇḍuranga, reflecting the devotion and sincerity of the heart. He provided food for the hungry and water for the thirsty, ensuring that all were nourished without harm or attachment.

His son, Yama, was married to a virtuous and devoted woman, Bhāgīrathī, whose beauty and grace reflected her unwavering devotion. Bōdhalaya honored the wishes of his elders with love and respect, and through prayerful speech and kind gestures, he ensured the well-

being of all. When difficulties arose, the Lord Himself intervened—Paṇḍharīnātha appeared miraculously, providing guidance and solace to the devoted.

Even in moments of worldly challenge, the Lord's mercy manifested. Food was transformed into a divine offering, and a miraculous display of grace revealed flowers in place of meat, astonishing all who witnessed it. The benevolence of the Lord was evident, and even the rulers, witnessing these miracles, recognized the extraordinary devotion of the faithful.

Vishṇudās, a devotee, remained humble and content, refusing worldly wealth, yet he continued to serve with love. Malang Fakīr of Paṇḍharīnātha's temple attended Bōdhalaya and asked what was desired; provisions of food, clothing, and wealth were granted immediately according to sincere devotion. Bhāgīrathī, his virtuous daughter-in-law, was also blessed, her beauty and grace revealed through the Lord's mercy.

The narrative emphasizes the power of devotion, the importance of surrender to the guru, and the limitless compassion of Paṇḍharīnātha. With unwavering faith, the devotees, children, and householders, all found guidance, protection, and grace. Through these acts, the divine presence became manifest, the hearts of devotees were uplifted, and the glory of the Lord and His devotees was firmly established.

Finally, the sacred rites concluded with the auspicious bathing ceremony and the offering of the fivefold nectar meal (pancāmṛta bhōjan), marking the fulfillment of the Lord's mercy and the joy of the devotees.

Even as the world's elders spoke of separation and attachment, declaring that I should keep my distance from the monastery lest desire arise in your heart, yet eventually withdraw from it, the Faqīr replied to Bōdhalaya with the calmness of a boundless ocean of virtue. "Do not waver in thought even for a moment," he said, "let your heart remain steady and serene."

Bhāgīrathī, adorned with a fresh turban and new garments, performed the auspicious bath and offered turmeric and vermilion, placing the meal before him with reverence. The Faqīr stood in the courtyard, taking the offering from her hands, and blessed her, wishing for her well-being. Sitting respectfully beside him, Bhāgīrathī watched with joy, and Bōdhalaya's heart overflowed with bliss, leaving no room for worldly attachment.

As the Faqīr traveled through the villages, observing the women of the community, he performed spiritual rites with utmost dedication. Even if alms had been given in the past, he offered sustenance and clothing with sincere intent. Those at home received it with humility, while the Faqīr's own heart remained detached, focused entirely on Paṇḍuranga. Meditating upon the Lord, he transcended worldly concerns, even as gossip arose about the women's deeds.

The Faqīr, in the form of the Lord Himself, guided Bhāgīrathī, and together they went to the village shrine. Lowering food into the proper vessels, the four-armed Lord holding conch, discus, and clad in yellow garments appeared before their eyes. Bhāgīrathī approached with

devotion, bowing to His feet, her heart immersed in deep, indigo-blue contemplation, witnessing the form of the Supreme Being.

Addressing the elder, the Faqīr promised, “I shall return to your presence; until then, there is nothing else to do.” He later observed the village, watching over his family and guiding them without being seen. Bhāgīrathī grieved, her heart filled with sorrow, yet the Faqīr’s unseen presence comforted them, as Bōdhalaya lamented his inability to remain near.

Even when returning home, the worldly constraints and family obligations weighed upon him, yet the greater welfare of all remained foremost in his heart. Balancing worldly duties with spiritual devotion, he witnessed the events with a sense of detachment and care. When returning to the village, he shared the secret of Bhāgīrathī’s dedication and grace with the community, filling hearts with joy.

He advised his son, Bōdharāja, “Keep your devotion firm like a Garuḍadhvaja in the form of a Faqīr. Today, righteousness is upheld by your presence; you are named Dharmarāja, the first among your siblings formerly called Yamājī.” Thus, the renaming signified the continuity of dharma through the virtuous household.

With drums and cymbals, the Vaishṇava devotees gathered, singing kīrtans in unison, their voices resounding with love for the Lord. The chants of Viththal’s name brought immense joy to the assembly, and the day was proclaimed auspicious and blessed. The kīrtans continued, and Bōdhalaya, witnessing Bhāgīrathī, expressed his reverence at her feet, lifting her with devotion and placing her head upon his own in assurance and blessing.

The Faqīr, embodying the presence of Paṇḍharīnātha, had come to see the devotion of the household. With the Lord’s grace, Bhāgīrathī’s piety and love were affirmed. Their child, lovingly named Bhagavantabāva, symbolized divine blessing, and in the village of Bhojbāva at Dhāmaṇgaon, the devotees assembled for the pilgrimage of Ashāḍha. The fame of the devotee’s service grew through ages, bringing honor and respect to the devotee community.

The account describes Madhvanātha, a learned Brahmin, who bathed daily in the sacred waters, meditated upon the Lord, and offered unwavering devotion to Śrī Paṇḍuranga with a single-minded heart. Through the practice of chanting the Lord’s name, he attained a direct vision of the Supreme Being, who granted him the inspiration to record the sacred acts of devotion for the benefit of all.

Musical instruments—cymbals and drums—accompanied the kīrtans, creating an atmosphere of divine resonance, drawing devotees’ hearts into absorption and joy. As the devotees listened, they forgot bodily awareness and immersed themselves in the remembrance of the Lord. By the Lord’s command, the devotees were instructed to travel the land, spreading the path of devotion and establishing the practice of bhakti everywhere.

Wherever the hypocrites and disputers harassed the faithful, the Lord’s presence protected the devotees, and the sacred journey commenced. The kīrtans resounded across the

country, drawing both devotees and the curious, and the faithful, such as in Aurangabad, experienced the bliss of Madhvanātha's devotional music. With reverence and hospitality, the devotees welcomed Śrīnātha, and households prepared to host them with generosity and devotion.

Through unwavering service and spiritual guidance, devotees maintained the sacred practice of kīrtan at home, offering sweets and sustenance to the learned and the pious. Continuous joy filled the gatherings as the kīrtans resounded daily. The fame of Madhvanātha spread across regions, his eloquence and devotion made manifest, with Śrī Hari Himself assisting the faithful.

Even in distant Mumbai, Kanhojī, a noble and generous devotee, received learned scholars—over fourteen hundred—and maintained the path of righteousness and devotion, demonstrating the enduring influence of the Lord's grace through generations.

Among the devotees, there stood a distinguished scholar, a master of instruments and music, known as Bhāskarāya. Learned in the scriptures, he guided the proceedings of discourse, ensuring that the kīrtans were not rendered in the common language, but in the proper sacred style. Thus, the rules were firmly established, and he addressed the host with clarity and authority.

Haridās, a skilled and eloquent speaker, arrived for the festival. Musical accompaniment was arranged under his guidance, ensuring the proper rhythm and flow. The scholar pledged that from that day forward, no vernacular texts or songs would be employed at the gathering. Haridās, committed to this vow, adhered strictly, and debates were conducted daily under the watchful eyes of the scholars. Yet, despite the disputes, the theatre of knowledge unfolded without discord.

Meanwhile, in a divine vision, Paṇḍharīnātha appeared to Madhvanātha, instructing him to proceed to certain places for further sacred work. Promptly, the Lord set forth, traveling across the land with his family and gathering the devoted community along the way. Cymbals and drums were played harmoniously, dhṛupad rhythms followed meticulously, and the path of devotion progressed under Madhvanātha's leadership.

Madhvanātha's fame as a kīrtan performer had already spread, bringing honor and recognition from hosts, who greeted him with love and humility. The devotees bowed in reverence, offering embraces, and then prepared meals in service, placing them appropriately before the assembly.

Bhāskarāya, the scholar, observed and confirmed the account of Madhvanātha's arrival from the city, to conduct the kīrtans. The composition of verses and devotional songs reflected supreme literary and spiritual excellence, inspiring the present assembly and dispelling pride with countless virtues. Even if someone had previously claimed mastery, only the true essence of the sacred tales prevailed, as Madhvanātha's presence revealed humility and devotion, overcoming ego and enmity.

At night, the host arranged a divine seating for the gathering. Haridās and the Brahmin scholar sat attentively, while Bhāskarāya, filled with righteous indignation, appeared stern and commanding. Madhvanātha, resolute in devotion, offered respectful salutations to the assembly, observing the leaders with insight. Musical instruments were played, and the kīrtan began in earnest.

From the outset, the discourse commenced with auspicious verses, as the Bhagavān spoke of profound knowledge. The scholar's anger grew, lips trembling like Rāvaṇa consumed by the memory of Śrī Rāma. The debate arose naturally, yet the Lord's incarnation as Madhvanātha guided the proceedings. He explained that the sons of ascetics were in truth incarnations of Vishnu, and that the authority of scriptures and saints supported this revelation.

Madhvanātha revealed the divine pastimes of the Lord in various forms—Vishnu's Matsya, Kurma, and Varāha incarnations—and clarified that even in worldly deeds, the Lord's influence was manifest. The texts of Vyāsadeva, the steps of Jnāneśvar, and the qualities of Muktābāī were invoked to validate the sacred acts and miracles. Even the highest priests had attempted to challenge the devotees, yet Madhvanātha's discourse, amplified through the recitation of scriptures, revealed the depth of divine and devotional wisdom.

The power of the Lord's holy name, particularly in this age of Kali, was exalted, and the practice of kīrtan was established firmly, supported by scriptural evidence. Hymns, slokas, and the teachings of Tuka and the Upanishads were interpreted in alignment with sacred meaning, illuminating hearts and minds. The purity and potency of the Lord's name were described, emphasizing that even a child practicing devotion could attain liberation.

Through the dialogue, the sound of Viththal's name echoed, and the vibrations of the divine sound transcended all worldly happiness. The kīrtan was rendered in such a way that even the scholars, like Bhāskarāya, were humbled, acknowledging that Madhvanātha was no ordinary devotee, but a manifestation of the Lord Himself.

The learned scholar Bhāskarāya, though a master of the scriptures and ritual, remained devoid of personal pride, embracing the devotion of the heart without attachment. Through the practice of kīrtan and devotion, all obstacles were overcome, and the devotees, following the instructions of Madhvanātha, performed their service with deep reverence and unity.

The assembly, adorned with cymbals, drums, and dhṛupad rhythms, joined in harmonious devotion. The devotional atmosphere inspired awe and amazement among all present. Those who could not attend on some days, such as Lakṣmaṇpant, hurried to participate despite worldly duties, leaving business and labor aside. Serving with loving hands, he became a devoted instrument in the service of Rukmiṇī and the Lord.

In Madhvanātha's private chamber, great enthusiasm arose, and the composition of literary works proceeded swiftly. Lakṣmaṇpant, the host, ensured proper arrangements, accounting for all needs, while the authors were provided sixteen coins for their efforts, secured carefully

in a chest. Hājī Mahammad Khān, the local magistrate, was informed and supervised the arrangement of accommodations for the Brahmins.

Despite internal anxiety and restless concern, the sacred festival and assembly of devotees were successfully organized. The entire endeavor was dedicated to the guidance of the true Guru, ensuring that the practice of kīrtan and devotional observances continued without hindrance.

O ocean of mercy, Lord Paṇḍharīnātha, now take me under your protection and deliver me. Without Your grace, O shelter of the helpless, who else will protect the destitute and lowly?

At that time, Madhvanātha, arriving with his disciples, conveyed instructions to the assembled community. He told Lakṣmaṇpant, the host, to ensure that the prisoners were provided with proper care and oversight. In the house, preparations were made for a festival, and arrangements were discussed for the devotional literature and kīrtan performances. Vishṇudās proceeded to the temple of Visājīpant to oversee the organization.

At the court, dignitaries sat in their places, while the host stood before them, instructing Lakṣmaṇpant to attend carefully for four days, to ensure that all proceedings were conducted according to sacred law. The festival was established, and the materials and resources were placed in their hands. Whatever the proper dharma dictated, they were to follow precisely.

Vishṇubhakta spoke in this manner, yet all the leaders were cautious. He offered sixteen hundred coins to the disciples and instructed them to follow Madhvanātha's guidance. Madhvanātha assured them that the community would arrive with enthusiasm, and he personally oversaw the proper distribution of the funds and resources, so that the glory of the devotees would be upheld and material greed restrained.

Declining to acknowledge Vishṇubhakta's wealth, Madhvanātha returned to the temple, demonstrating devotion to Lord Hṛṣīkeś with gentleness. The next day, the festivities commenced, with devotees offering loving worship. The Brahmins were served sweet food and given their dues, leaving them satisfied. Garuḍa banners were raised, drums and other instruments sounded, and kīrtan began that night. People arrived eagerly to listen.

Haridās also performed kīrtan for one prahar, addressing the heartfelt concerns of all present and explaining the Lord's answers. A loving devotee expressed that his literary compositions were nothing compared to the greatness of the divine, and Lakṣmaṇpant recalled these words with deep respect. Tears of devotion filled the eyes of those present.

Even when devotees faced great trials, Lord Hari alleviated their suffering. Even if material wealth was given, the teachings were imparted skillfully and with utmost precision. Madhvanātha's words were firm; none could oppose his wisdom. In disguise as a fakir, he taught lessons to the world, punishing wrongdoers and protecting his devoted servants. Those who attempted cruelty found themselves powerless before divine justice.

The Kazi, in the form of Śrī Kṛṣhṇakaradhara, received a lesson directly from Madhvanātha. Blood flowed from his back as the punishment was enacted. Laxman intervened to safeguard the prisoners, yet Madhvanātha remained in place, ensuring that justice and protection were perfectly observed.

Through these marvels, Sarangadhar witnessed the power of divine intervention. Visājīpant, asleep in the temple, beheld the fakir's actions and the subsequent punishments, rising quickly in astonishment. Hājī Mahammad Khān, the local magistrate, was terrified and left the place promptly, taking Lakṣmaṇpant with him. Torchbearers accompanied the procession.

In the temple of Visājīpant, amidst the old marketplace, the night passed with two prahars of sleep for the attendants. The authorities were awakened, and the wealthy were quickly attended to. People outside witnessed the magistrate standing at the gate, blood flowing from his back, as the fakir's justice was enacted.

Thus, Lakṣmaṇpant, who had protected the proceedings, received divine recognition. Madhvanātha, renouncing worldly life, appeared as a fakir, discarding his fine garments, wearing a simple kafan around his neck, and extinguishing all wealth while upholding the dharmic order. Even those bound by tamasic tendencies were transformed, and rajo-guṇi persons witnessed miracles, though Madhvanātha did not abandon the world entirely.

Hājī Mahammad Khān, seated on a horse, witnessed the spectacle, while Lakṣmaṇpant rode alongside, guiding the arrangements with efficiency and devotion. Madhvanātha, seated among the kīrtankārs, instructed and amused the assembled devotees, observing two full ghāṭikās, awaiting the arrival of Lakṣmaṇ's companions.

The disciples and community marveled at the events, while the prison authorities were left astounded. Two ghāṭikās passed, and the devotees assembled on horseback, with torchbearers accompanying them. Madhvanātha's devotees, bowing with devotion, placed their heads at the feet of the Guru and recounted the wondrous events, astonishing all who witnessed them.

Madhvanātha then stood before the kīrtan assembly, bringing joy to all present, as they listened with rapt attention. Acclamations and exclamations of "Jaya, Jaya!" filled the air, the devotees clapped in rhythm, and the kīrtan proceeded with vigor. At sunrise, kīrtan continued for four prahars, followed by mangalārati, offered reverently to Rukmiṇī.

The people of the region collectively praised Madhvanātha's deeds, exclaiming "Blessed, blessed!" for the extraordinary miracles they had witnessed. Hājī Mahammad Khān, moved by devotion, embraced the fakir, and Madhvanātha's vision was established in their hearts. Day by day, kīrtan continued with love and enthusiasm, the devotion of Gopāla Kāla and Lalit enhancing the celebrations.

Even the residents of Sendurwāḍe, a pious household, requested Madhvanātha to reside in their village. They invited him to establish his presence and conduct devotional activities, and thus the Guru and his disciples were joyfully received in the community.

Knowing the future with certainty, he honored the words of Madhvanātha. With his family, he settled at the designated place with deep devotion.

In front of the village, in the stream, a deity named Mahasobha was established, and the place was consecrated in the name of Gaṇapati. A grand festival was organized thereafter. Observing Madhvanātha's devotion, the devotees felt as though they had witnessed a sacred river of merit flowing through the place. They constructed a sacred tank for bathing, and people came to immerse themselves in its waters.

The sanctity of the site grew steadily, drawing devotees from far and near. Even as age and physical infirmity overtook him, the thought arose that he could no longer journey to Paṇḍharpur. Yet the desire for the Lord's darśana in a tangible form gave his soul immense joy. Witnessing this devotion, Lord Chakrapāṇi, in a dream, reassured him that at the courtyard of Udbhavabhaṭṭ, his deity would manifest.

Even if he went there, the divine form would be established in the earth, standing one and a half puruṣa tall, leaving no room for doubt. Seeing such devotion and love, he felt the joy of liberation in advance. Dreaming of this, his heart was filled with bliss.

The next morning, Madhvanātha, remembering the divine vision, went immediately to Udbhavabhaṭ's estate and narrated the entire account. He explained that the land itself held the deity of Pāṇḍuranga. Taking a sturdy hoe in hand, he began to dig the earth.

He first touched the ground, and soon the devotees gathered abundantly. As the soil was dug, a wave of delight spread through all present. Digging one and a half puruṣa deep, they beheld the deities of Pāṇḍuranga and Rukmiṇī. Their forms were beautiful, their countenances smiling and serene, perfectly adorned.

Witnessing this, the assembly burst into applause and joyful cries. Devotees danced in ecstasy, chanting the holy name in melodious cadence. Madhvanātha then built a temple at Udbhavabhaṭ's estate, establishing the deity with due observance of a propitious moment.

Brahmins performed the sacred rites with Vedic mantras, bathing the idols in the five nectars of Panchamrita and adorning them with fine garments and ornaments. Garlands of tulasī and flowers were offered, incense, lamps, and camphor filled the air, and freshly prepared food was presented as nāivedya without delay.

The sound of mangalavādya instruments resounded at the temple gates, accompanied by the rhythmic clatter of drums and cymbals. Mangalārati was offered to Rukmiṇīpati, and devotees were served in various ways. Night fell with devotional kīrtan, providing profound spiritual joy to attentive listeners.

Gopāla Kāla and Lalit, disciples of Madhvanātha, ensured the arrangements, while grand celebrations continued in Mārgeshwar and elsewhere. Madhvanātha's chosen disciple, Lakṣmaṇpant, held the dhṛupad firmly and recounted the life story of Paṇḍharīnātha, ensuring the full narration was understood.

On another day, Kāwopant of the town also received the service, involving generous expenditure for the festival. By the grace of the true Guru, it seemed as if the entire universe had become a devotee, listening and chanting, with the mangalārati held in reverence. The body was laid to rest at Chandrabhāgā in the fourth āśrama.

The third disciple, Amṛtarāya, became renowned among the people. His poetic talent and profound devotion led to extraordinary accounts of the Lord's deeds. The saints' wondrous states and divine acts were difficult to express adequately. Yet the texts were written faithfully, capturing each episode.

The heart continually recalled Pāṇḍurangapati, while the devotee recorded the words with love, finding joy in telling these sacred stories. By the grace of Śrī Pāṇḍuranga, these texts were written as acts of devotion, their study ensuring the memory of each episode.

The first chapter opens with prayers to Gaṇeśa and Sarasvatī, followed by worship of the great Guru Tukārāma, offering verbal flowers of devotion. By the grace of Agradās, Nabājī attained perfect knowledge, and the saints' biographies were recorded. This constituted the first account.

In the second chapter, the story narrates how Chāngadeva appeared as the incarnation to remove the curse of Purandare and the Marudgans, with the Lord manifesting in a tangible form. Subsequent chapters describe the deeds of Vedas, the singular fame of Jnāndeva, the miraculous visits of Marudgans, and the guidance of Dattātreya.

The fifth chapter explains sacrifices offered by disciples, the sixteenth lesson, and the return of devotees, followed by the seventh, describing the next incarnation of Narayana and the visit to Paṇḍharpur. The bones were cleansed, and a widow immediately bore a son, named Bhātavaṇḍyā, all detailed over seven chapters.

The eighth chapter narrates the birth of Krishna-bāī to the Yādava woman and her complete story. The ninth chapter recounts Chāngadeva rescuing a woman from Yavanarāja and bringing her to Paṇḍharpur. Madhvanātha consecrated the temple, and Chāngadeva entered samādhi. At age twelve, his sons met him, their story recorded in the tenth chapter.

The eleventh chapter deals with the revelations of Nanak, the twelfth the debate between Kabīr and Rohidās, and the thirteenth the essence of the stories. The fourteenth narrates the biography of Śrī Ekanātha, and devotees immediately sought refuge with Janārdana, who bestowed blessings as Dattātreya.

In the fourteenth chapter, the story unfolds marvelously, recounting how Eknātha, journeying to sacred sites, received the dhṛupad in the form of Viththala. The fifteenth chapter continues the narrative.

In the sixteenth, the account deepens, showing Eknātha assuming the role of Uddhav, repaying his spiritual debt with complete fulfillment. Witnessing Śrīnātha's divine form, a devotee experienced its vision in a dream. In the seventeenth chapter, the tangible form of Pāṇḍuranga appeared, and his fame spread.

The eighteenth chapter narrates Eknātha's pilgrimage to Paṇḍharpur, singing the complete biography of Bhānudās in devotional kīrtan. In Dandavatī, he entered samādhi, enduring severe trials at the hands of a Brāhmaṇī, while Nandin swiftly consumed the bitter herbs offered. The nineteenth chapter completes this account.

Śrīkhāṇḍyā, a Brāhmaṇ devotee of Hari, carried water in the twentieth chapter. In the temple, he protected the captive Mahar, while Eknātha assumed dual forms, granting solace to the nameless devotee and submerging the scholars in the Bhagavata. This marked the twenty-first chapter.

The twenty-second chapter recounts Eknātha reading the Bhagavata, assuming the form of a woman, delighting the listeners as the divine maiden Vishnukanya. The twenty-third describes the Brāhmaṇī household hosting the Vaishṇava hero, feeding thousands, and performing miracles with their sons.

Gāvajī Muka, born lifelong mute, held the Ramayana in his hands. Eknātha then entered samādhi, forming the twenty-fourth chapter. Observing the devotion of the world and his mother, he sent letters from Paṇḍharpur, narrating his deeds in the twenty-fifth chapter.

Gomati observed steadfast devotion, and Namdev incarnated in her womb. Tukārāma was named finally, in the twenty-sixth chapter. A Vaishṇava devotee, selling chili, borrowed funds from the Lord and boiled them; at the threshold of the gate, he hanged himself in the twenty-seventh chapter.

Tukārāma, enduring hunger, took his final step in the twenty-eighth chapter, renouncing the world and settling at Parvati. The twenty-ninth describes him tending the field, becoming sustenance for birds, and ultimately stepping into Paṇḍharpur.

Breaking the thorn, he personally revealed Pāṇḍuranga, consecrating the temple, forming the thirtieth chapter. Bathing in the sacred waters and adorning the deity with yellow garments, offering food to ancestors, the thirty-first chapter concludes.

The thirty-second chapter marks the awakening of Tukārāma's poetic genius. Mahish thefts were overturned, and the Lord brought the devotee to Vaikuntha. In the thirty-third, he received divine instruction in a dream; the Queen clung to the Lord, who then manifested.

The thirty-fourth recounts his beautiful guidance, confiscating the Brāhmaṇ's house as divine justice. In the thirty-fifth, a devotee submerged the hymn in water, while Pāṇḍharpur offered refuge to Rameshwar. Tukārāma's steadfastness brought inner satisfaction.

Shivaji Raja came seeking refuge, the thirty-sixth chapter narrates. A Vaishṇava devotee in the form of a renunciant worshipped Shiva, and unique letters were sent from Paṇḍharpur in the thirty-seventh chapter.

The thirty-eighth recounts two renunciates petitioning for virtue, experiencing divine miracles. In the thirty-ninth, the devotee tore open his own skin, offering cotton to the Lord, while Tukārāma's birds rested upon his body.

In the forty-first chapter, the devotees attained liberation with their bodies, while the Lord showered divine flowers, their eyes witnessing the sacred vision. From the forty-first onward, many chapters describe saintly lives in great detail.

The forty-second recounts the disciples Keshavaswami, Baji, and Santoba Pawar meeting Jagajjīvan. Other accounts narrate Narpaḷ Raja, Ramraya Raja, and Ramabai Pilabai in the forty-second chapter.

The forty-third details Vogarasa Ramchandra's devotion, Ramanuja Suhāgsha, and Jaymall Panhaji Rajput. The forty-fourth recounts Haripāl Jasu's steadfast efforts and protection of Madhavdasa's fields.

The forty-fifth chapter describes Lalhan Khoji, Tripurdas, Trilochan Sonar, and the special devotee Sajankasāī. The forty-sixth recounts Narvahan, Sekhavat Raja Kunwarabai, and Giradhar Lal's visit to Sheshashayi.

The forty-seventh details the exploits of Kaji Mahammad Shekhreedi, Balkhabukhari Raja Yavan, and Jayram Baba Ramchandbhatt Brahmin. The forty-eighth highlights Ratnakar Brahmin and Gomati, Madhavdasa's fame, and devotion to Viththala Purandara.

The forty-ninth chapter recounts Narasimhasaraswati, Mahamudgalbhatt Vaishṇava hero, and meeting Śrī Ramchandra. The fiftieth chapter describes three biographies: Jasvant, Niranjan, and Krishna Das Jayaram.

In the fifty-first chapter, Madhvanātha's devotion reached Sendurwada, manifesting the Vaikunṭhapati. Across fifty-one chapters, detailed saintly biographies were recorded. The final chapter conveys these accounts in concise form.

Devotion to the Lord was abundant among his followers, recorded in Śrī Bhaktavijaya. Saints' divine acts were cataloged with precision. Among the supreme devotees were Namdev, the incarnation of Uddhav; Savantamali, Narhari Sonar; Kuba, Kumbhar, and Gora; Jagamitra Nagkhechar; Salya Rasaal; Surdas and Bahira; Jayadev Swami, Narsimahant, Rajay, Gonay; the extraordinary Tulsidas, Pipaji, Surdas, Govinddas; Paramanand Joga Visobakhechar;

Padmanabh Brahmin Chokha Mahar; Sumati and Kamalakar; Padmakar's son; Narayan Mahadev Govind; and four children of the name Yāmay.

Other notable devotees included Narhari and Shridharpant, Lādubhakta in Jotipur, Narayan Swami Parmahans, Nimberaj, Ramdas, Madanmohan Surdas, and Ganeshnath. All exhibited unwavering devotion, displaying remarkable leelas of the Lord.

Uddhavchit, a great and steadfast devotee, meticulously recorded the lives of saints, preserving their sacred deeds. Ranga Swami of Nigdikar, a Vaishṇava hero and perfect knower, along with Shrīdhar Swami, who commented insightfully on the Bhagavata, and Shankaracharya, the incarnation who expounded the path of karma, all exemplify devotion and wisdom.

Hariānanda, Raghavanand—a devotee filled with love—and the playful Ghannīl, ever immersed in divine sport, were celebrated saints. Vishnushyam Chaturacharya, along with Sanaka and others, Madhavanand, and Jagajjīvan, were all revered. Matsyendra and Goraksha Gaini, the crowned heads among yogis, Gopinand, Queen of Mainavati, and the sages of Jalandhar, were recognized as perfected beings.

Charpati and Chaurangi, along with Hālsī, widely known in the world, and Mṛtyunjay, the great yogi, resided among devotees. Sena Nhavi Trilochan, the steps of Jnanadeva's liberation, and Muktabai, repository of virtues, remained steadfast, never abandoning their devotion to Rukminīpati.

Dhangochāmbhar Kumbhar Raka, and his wife Baka, and the maiden Vanka, who attained the favor of the Lord of Vaikunṭha, illustrate exemplary devotion. Mukundarāj, famed worldwide, composed the ocean of wisdom; Mudhopant Dāmājīpant's devotion was pleasing to the Lord. Kanho Patra, Pimpaḷa Bāla, Mira, Girdhar Dās, and Alah Yogānanda, a lover of divine bliss, dwelt near Ghannīl.

Karmānand Sāri, Ramdās, Shrīrang, Keelkadās, Bhuvan, and Harivyās, all devotees pleasing to the Lord, along with Krishna Chaitanya, Bansi Dhar, Kamla Karmāḷī, Nama Pathak, and Mukteshwar Mahākavi, displayed devotion in its highest form. Vallabhacharya Bālkarām, Uddhavrāj, and Vimlānand's love for the Lord exemplified the supreme ideal.

Chaturā Naga Laxman, Chintāmani Chaturbhuj, and Sukhānand and Narayan constantly engaged in bhajan. Damodar, Gangā Kaviśwar, Prayāgdās, Madhavdās, and Madhusudan's devotion never faltered. Ramabai Lāsā, Gomati, Venubai Girijā, and Kurmadās' devotion brought forth the manifestation of Pāṇḍuranga.

Keshav Chaitanya, Raghav Chaitanya, and Bāwa Chaitanya, famous saints, established the path of bhakti. Haridas Kanha, devoted in Paṇḍharpur, Parhlād Badviya, and Vīsoba Saraf Nimbasodkar, the truly generous and steadfast, fulfilled their debts of devotion to Rukminīpati.

Raghupati Shesh, Krishnadas Lolyā, Rudrāi Yoginī, Shivram Gosavi of Paithan, Narayan Nimbay, and Niloba Gosavi, devotees residing at Pimpaḷner, adorned this garland of saints, entwined in devotion to Pāṇḍuranga. This supreme blissful form of the Lord, Brahmānanda Parabrahma, offered the devotees boundless joy.

Even today, many saints remain hidden, revealed only in spirit; at their feet, kings bow in heartfelt reverence. Devotees of unwavering devotion became the true Warkaris of Paṇḍharpur, their love and kīrtan echoing eternally. Vaishṇava devotees are countless, their numbers beyond calculation; their singular devotion is apparent to all.

Rama's incarnation was accompanied by devoted followers, whose eighteen Padmas carry glory. Krishna's avatar saw Gopāl and the shepherds nurtured by sages. The sixty-six crore Yādavas, Navalakṣa Gopāl, and the Gopikās, countless in number, defy calculation, yet the Lord knows each by name.

Even I, humble and of simple intellect, dare not enumerate them all. The world's matters need not distract, nor should the method of narration cause confusion; the saints' lives must be faithfully recorded in simple, sincere language. True devotion is preserved not in elaborate scholarship, but in the heartfelt recounting of their deeds.

As thorns protect a tree, devotion guards the soul; just as fragrant flowers bring delight, so too does the remembrance of saints' acts preserve love for the divine. The essence of this scripture is that those who hear and understand it receive the Lord, and their hearts' desires are fulfilled by Rukminīkānta himself.

A collection of saints' lives, compiled in households, removes obstacles and fosters steadfastness. Reading these stories purifies the mind, dispels hatred, and leads across the ocean of worldly existence. The compassionate author offers this work as a guide, providing support for the devotee.

Just as pearls emerge from the sea, the true scope of saints' lives is often hidden, their names revealed only in part. Some flowers bloom first, some later; yet all combine into a garland of devotion. The work was composed with love, sprinkled with the blossoms of piety, honoring Rukminīpati and residents of Paṇḍharpur.

Completed in the year 1652 of the Shaka era, on the fourth day of Krishna Paksha in Phalgun, the work achieved perfection. From Prāvare to the south, in the village of Tahrābād, this compilation of the Bhaktalīlāamṛta found its ultimate delight.

I offered my words in devotion to Garuḍadhvajā Jai Devadideva, and now my heart's desire is fulfilled. Neither worldly enjoyment nor liberation alone is sought; only the glorification of the Lord's devotees remains. This concludes the sacred Bhaktalīlāamṛta. Let readers delight in the stories of saints, and may devotion blossom in their hearts.

Thus ends the fifty-first chapter, the 1,0794 verses of this sacred work.

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